The Road to Hamburg and Beyond: African American Agency and the Making of a Radical African Atlantic, 1922-1930. Part One

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Prologue

Hamburg, early July 1930. A group of Africans, African Caribbeans and African Americans are meeting behind closed doors. They have all responded to a call by the Provisional Board of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) to participate in a conference. The outcome of the meeting was the formal establishment of the ITUCNW. For the next three years, the organization was to manifest itself as a radical trade union for ‘Negro workers’ throughout the world. British and French Colonial governments labelled the organization as yet another mouthpiece of Moscow and the Comintern, banned its activities and the distribution of its journal, *The Negro Worker*, in their colonies. Later research has mainly identified it as the key platform for George Padmore during his pre-Pan-African, i.e., communist, activities. By 1933, however, with the Nazi takeover in Germany and Padmore’s quarrel and subsequent rift with the communists in 1934, the ITUCNW lost its momentum and was quietly disbanded in 1937. Among the few traces it left were copies of its journal, which were shelved in the archives and libraries.

The existence and ‘grand narrative’ of the ITUCNW is known to researchers. The organization was part of the transnational apparatus of the Communist International or Comintern. Being a trade union, the ITUCNW was a sub-section of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU or Profintern), the trade union-wing of the Comintern. The aim of the ITUCNW was to serve as a global or transnational platform to activate and coordinate agitation and propaganda among ‘Negro workers’ throughout the world. In effect, its focus was to establish links to and support African, African Caribbean and African American radical trade union activists. The crucial

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1 The study consists of three parts. The activities of African American radicals leading to the establishment of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers in 1928 are discussed in Part One. The actions of the activists during 1929 are outlined in Part Two. In the third part, the organization and immediate effects of the Hamburg Conference of Negro Toilers in July 1930 are analyzed in Part Three.

2 The acronym is spelled in two ways in the research literature, ITUCNW and ITUC-NW. I will use the former one which is equal to the way it is used in (most) archival sources.
difference between the ITUCNW and other Pan-African organizations was in the formers focus on the class aspect: the global struggle of the ‘Negro toilers’ was fundamentally a class, not a race issue.³

Although the Comintern was to pursue several strategies towards the African, Caribbean and African American condition during the 1920s and early 1930s, all of them were basically variations of the so-called ‘Negro’ and Colonial Question. These two ‘questions’ were until 1928 closely tied together with respect to Africa and the African Diaspora – although the situation on the African continent apart from South Africa had only received sporadic comments at best. After the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928, the situation was to change and Sub-Saharan Africa (as well as the Caribbean) was to receive attention by the communists in Moscow. The problem (or challenge), however, for the leading Bolshevik theoreticians was the lack of a working class, not to speak about a radical working class movement, in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. What they could identify was a ‘national bourgeoisie’ in Africa who were criticising the colonial authorities and colonial structures and conditions, sometimes even rallying behind radical bourgeoisie movements and organizations.⁴

Until 1928, the strategy in Moscow was to pursue what was called the ‘United Front’-policy which, among others, manifested itself in the 1927 Brussels Anti-colonial congress and the foundation of the League Against Imperialism (LAI). At this time, the Comintern and its front organizations would still try to establish links to radical bourgeoisie leaders and movements. About one year later, Comintern policy

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scraped the former policy and turned to the ‘Class Against Class’ and ‘United Front from Below’ approach. The establishment of the ITUCNW belongs to this new approach, as also previous research has underlined. In addition, Comintern approach towards Africa and the ‘Negro world’ became more differentiated. Whereas the ‘Negro Question’ in the USA became part and parcel of the internal developments in North America and where thus handed by commissions in Moscow especially dealing with the USA (the Anglo-American Section), the ITUCNW was to focus on the British colonies and the Anglophone Atlantic world, i.e., the British Caribbean, but excluding South Africa. Connections with French colonial Africa and Francophone Atlantic were established through another organization, the Ligue de la Defense de la Race Negré or LDRN.5

Nevertheless, in view of the ‘success story’ of political Pan-Africanism, the ITUCNW was a mere episode, even a cul-de-sac. Critical observers and academic researchers, such as Roger E. Kanet and Edward T. Wilson, though sympathetic to its aspirations, are negative in their overall assessment of the impact of the ITUCNW.6 British colonial intelligence were right in their assumption that the organization was orchestrated from Moscow, the Comintern and its trade union wing, the Profintern or RILU (Red International Labour Union), to support anti-colonial anti-imperial agitation and activities. Perhaps as early as C.L.R. James World Revolution 1917-1936 (1937), and definitively with George Padmore’s influential Pan-Africanism or Communism (1956), the challenge posed by communism and the Comintern to the colonial and imperial system were given a critical, if not negative presentation. Whereas James presentation was written from an opportunist or Trotskyist perspective, blaming Stalin and the bolshevization of the communist movement for the betrayal of a world revolution, a critical evaluation of Padmore’s position is more problematic. By the time of writing his book, Padmore had for long emerged as one of the key apologetics of political Pan-Africanism. However, between 1928 and 1933, i.e., the zenith of the ITUCNW and its predecessor, the Provisional ITUCNW, he himself was one of the most outspoken critics of the race issue and belonged to the

5 Wilson 1974, 229-239.
defenders of the ‘class before race’ paradigm. Only with his break with Moscow in late 1933 did he change his position.⁷

The negative image of the ITUCNW and its short, but hectic, life is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the few first-hand assessments, such as Padmore’s, were conducted a posteriori during the age of the Cold War and the heydays of African nationalism. From the perspective of the 1950s and 1960s, the ‘road to independence’ of the African states started with movements that had a Pan-African vision, i.e., race, not class was in the end to be the fundament for African political mobilization. Organizations, such as the ITUCNW, which articulated a communist or Marxist ideology challenging the race concept, were labelled as ‘racist’. Later research on the colonial activities of the British and French Communist Parties, even the Comintern itself, during the 1920s and 1930s confirmed this critique. On of the most outspoken critics is Marika Sherwood, who claims that

> the Party [i.e., the CPGB] as a whole, sitting in the heart of the British Empire, surrounded by Black Britons residing in all the major ports and cities who had ample information on their oppression in Britain and the colonies, did nothing.⁸

Secondly, and tied to my first observation, the negative assessment of the ITUCNW is due to its global character. Being an organization – and network – with a global outreach, attempting to establish a radical platform for ‘Negro workers’ in Africa, in the Caribbean, the USA and Europe, its agenda was difficult to combine with that of especially African nationalists and the political history of African independence movements. In the USA, the ‘Black Belt thesis’, the brainchild of radical Afro-American communists that argued in favour of ‘Black self-determination’ and called for the establishment of a ‘Black State’ in the USA, was accepted by the Comintern in 1928 as the official line⁹. Nevertheless, apart from being adopted by a few radical

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elements in the USA,\textsuperscript{10} the major bulk of the African American population turned its back to such ideas\textsuperscript{11}. Even the backing of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) was lukewarm at its best. In fact, the ‘Black Belt thesis’ was never unanimously backed even among the African American communists themselves. Not surprisingly, the thesis, too, was quietly scrapped and was thereafter mainly found in academic presentations.\textsuperscript{12} At present, as in the historiography of African political history, communist and leftwing radicalism among African Americans, though noted and sometimes outlined at length, too, is evaluated as a dead end in itself.\textsuperscript{13} A similar situation persists in Caribbean political history writing: it is national, ‘Pan-Caribbean’ or Pan-African, depending on the perspective of the writer.\textsuperscript{14}

Thus, seen from the above outline, it could be argued that there is room for re-evaluation of the ITUCNW, especially if the organization and its network are analyzed from a ‘forward reading’ perspective. Hitherto, most evaluations and analyses of the ITUCNW have taken a ‘backward reading’ perspective, i.e., being an explanation of the ‘failure’ of the organization. However, such a teleological position is problematic as there are few, if any, outright signs of a ‘failure’ before the Nazi takeover in Germany in early spring 1933.

Even more suspicious is the weak source basis on which most of the evaluations of the ITUCNW are based. During its short-lived existence, the organization published several dozens of pamphlets in addition to its monthly journal. Some of the pamphlets, such as the Proceedings of the 1930 Hamburg Conference and George Padmore’s Life and Struggle of the Negro Toilers (1931), were in fact books and

\textsuperscript{10} The most passionate defender of the thesis was Harry Haywood, see Harry Haywood, Black Bolshevik. Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist, Chicago: Liberator Press 1978. Haywood criticized Pepper’s pamphlet as a distorted version of the new line (Haywood 1978, 268).


\textsuperscript{13} Though some radical Black minority movements still cling to the idea of self-determination. See, for example, the home page of the Revolutionary Political Organization/Marxist-Leninist Amilcar Cabral/Paul Robeson Collective: ‘Against Revisionism on the Afro-American National Question’, www.mltranslations.org/US/Rpo/aau/aau.htm (17.4.2008).

constitute the sole source for the reconstruction of the ITUCNW in many academic presentations. In fact, an uncritical reading of especially the *Proceedings* has resulted in some errors. For example, some authors claim that Garan Kouyaté, Jomo Kenyatta or I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson participated in the meeting (they did not) or that the *Proceedings* were published in 1930, as claimed on the cover of the publication (it was not).

Further confusion is added through the use of Hooker’s biography about George Padmore and C.L.R. James’ statements about Padmore’s activities during the early 1930s. One intriguing question, which has puzzled several researchers, concerns Padmore’s activities and whereabouts during these years: when was he in Moscow, when in West Africa and when did he run the secretariat in Hamburg? Even more challenging has been the reconstruction of I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson’s connections to Padmore. A common claim has been that this West African radical participated at the Hamburg Conference. However, as I have claimed in a recent investigation, he did not. A further challenge is posed by the subjective position Padmore is claimed to have had in running and operating the ITUCNW, resulting in downplaying the activities of two other central actors, Otto Huiswoud and James W. Ford.

**The Road to Moscow: On Archival Sources and Methods**

Due to lack of archival sources, research on the ITUCNW has hitherto limited itself to the formation of the organization. Many of the threads that led to establishment of the ITUCNW are known, but the overall picture is still vague. This is mainly due to the fact that none of the studies have focussed on the organization, its activists and their global network itself. Reference to the ITUCNW is given in works that deal with the history of the RILU, Afro-American radicalism, Caribbean political history or African political history, but each presentation misses the global network and outreach of the organization and its activists. This is, one could claim, in part due to the nature of the organization and its world wide web. On the one hand, the ITUCNW was part of the Comintern/RILU network, on the other hand, it emerged as a network of articulated radical international (‘Black’) solidarity. Both perspectives have been known, but the

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lack of original sources, such as correspondence between the secretariat in Hamburg and Moscow as well as the correspondence between Hamburg and activists in the USA, the UK, France, the Caribbean and Africa, has made any deeper investigations futile.

Until the opening in 1991 of the Comintern archives in Moscow, any reconstruction of the ITUCNW network rested mainly on published sources and external evaluations, such as colonial intelligence reports and investigations. Some researchers, among others Adolf Rüger and Ruth Deutschland, even assumed that much, if not all, of the existing correspondence had been lost after 1933. The first blow, it is assumed, was the police raid and closure of the Hamburg secretariat of the ITUCNW in early March 1933. The second is claimed to have occurred during the 1944 Allied bombings of Hamburg: it is assumed that all the confiscated material was destroyed.\footnote{Rüger 1967; Deutschland 1980, 710 fn 4.}

Such an assumption is backed by an entry in the catalogue of the R-1507, Reichskommissar zur Überwachung der öffentlichen Ordnung und Nachrichtensammelstelle im Reichsministerium des Inneren archival unit in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin. Although there exists a heading ‘Negerkonferenz in Hamburg’ (Sachakte: Internationales Gewerkschaftskomitee der Neger-Arbeiter) in the catalogue (Findbuch), this headline is crossed over, i.e., it does not contain any documents.\footnote{Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArchB), Findbuch R1507 Reichskommissar für Überwachung der öffentlichen Ordnung, 1. Bestand. (Stand 1998). The preface of the catalogue is dated Potsdam, September 1940.} There are two possibilities for this situation: when the archival unit was created in 1940 (as indicated in the catalogue), the documents had not yet been transferred to the archive (i.e., being in the custody of some other authorities, perhaps the police authorities in Hamburg or the GESTAPO) and were destroyed for one or the other reason during the war, or the material was removed from the archive though outside intervention, presumably by the Soviet authorities who confiscated all archival material in 1945 and had it transported to Russia. Why, however, would the Soviet authorities be interested in keeping the materials of a defunct and, from their perspective, insignificant organization? Besides, most of the confiscated German archival material was handed back to the East German authorities and deposited in the central archives of the German Democratic Republic in Potsdam.
Be as it may, most historians have – rightly – assumed that the Comintern Archives in Moscow are central to any investigation on the ITUCNW and other front organizations, such as the LAI, which had their headquarters in Weimar Germany. As the Comintern was a hierarchical and heavily controlled organization, any organization had to be in contact with the Comintern Headquarters in Moscow. Especially transnational and global organizations, such as the ITUCNW or the LAI, had little room for private initiatives which lest they were initiated or at least backed by Moscow. In addition, most, if not all, of these organizations were not only in direct contact with Moscow, but were also under surveillance of intermediary Comintern control platforms, such as the West European Bureau (WEB) in Berlin. Last, but not least, the whole Comintern apparatus was based on bureaucratic paper exercise: confidential letters and reports were sent to Moscow, reports were submitted to decision-making boards, such as the Eastern Secretariat, the Executive Commission and the Political Secretariat. In sum: although the Hamburg archives of the ITUCNW are perhaps lost or were destroyed, the organization and its activists must have left traces in Moscow.

The challenge with archival research in Moscow is the Comintern Archive itself. During the heydays of the Comintern, the archive was never a final destination of administrative papers or a closed unit, but a deposit of potential ongoing cases. This meant that files could be transferred from one archival unit to another – sometimes even without leaving a note in the original deposit. For example, the German Communist Willi Münzenberg sent in 1927 a letter to the Eastern Secretariat in which he had enclosed a letter from the Gold Coast. Münzenberg made a reference to the Gold Coast dispatch in his letter, but the actual letter was not included in the file. Instead, I located the letter among the files of the Political Secretariat. More confusion, if not chaos, was added to the archive in 1940 when it had to be evacuated in an extreme hurry to Ufa. Although there was thereafter an attempt to organize the archive, work ended abruptly in 1943 when the Comintern was dissolved. Thereafter, the archives were more or less closed but to a small group of researchers.

Empirical academic research on the Comintern and its front organizations had to wait until the opening of the Comintern Archives in 1991. Since then, the main focus of research has been on national communist parties or on key international
communist activist and topics. Not surprisingly, the African connection has been little studied, apart from South Africa where Apollon Davidson and his research group have been able to produce a two-volume source edition. Unfortunately, there are only indirect references to the ITUCNW in the edition. On the other hand, a few researchers have stumbled across the ITUCNW in their research in Moscow. These are to be found in Mark Solomon’s seminal work on the relationship between African Americans and the Communist Party, in Marika Sherwood’s critical presentation about the colonial work of the Communist Party of Great Britain, in Joyce Moore Turner’s and Maria van Enckevort’s research on Otto Huiswoud, in Peter Martin’s outline on African radials in Weimar Germany, in Robbie Aitken’s account on Joseph Bilé, and in Hakim Adi’s recent analysis of the ITUCNW. Only Van Eckevort, Aitken and Adi make extensive use of the Comintern Archives and are able to give interesting and solid outlines of the activities during the years 1928 to 1933. Martin’s article is rather vague on the activities of the ITUCNW after 1931, and Sherwood, who has a very good insight on the papers dealing with the neglect of the African work of Communist Party, comments in a footnote that the history of the ITUCNW is yet to be written.

As the ITUCNW was a subsection of the RILU, the key archival unit to be checked is Fond (fund) 534, Opis (inventory) 3. This inventory contains archival material from all of the various RILU subsections, including the ITUCNW (Materialy

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18 See further Fredrik Petersson, Historiographical Trends and the Comintern – The Communist International (Comintern) and How it has been Interpreted, CoWoPa 8/2007.
Mezhdunarodnogo profkomitea rabochikh-negrov Profinterna), and is mostly organized in a running chronological order. ITUCNW material is found in the following units:

- 534/3/359 (1928)
- 534/3/450 (1929)
- 534/3/490 (1930)
- 534/3/546 (1930)
- 534/3/668–669 (1931)
- 534/3/753–756 (1932)
- 534/3/895 (1933)
- 534/3/986 (1934)
- 534/3/1055 (1935)
- 534/3/1103 (1936, 1937)

However, these funds only contain documents that were generated by the so-called Negro Bureau of the RILU in Moscow, i.e., protocols and minutes of meetings of the Negro Bureau, reports and correspondence by members of the Bureau, and draft versions of resolutions by the Bureau. Other key archival units are fond 534/6/23 and 534/7/74. These funds contain correspondence between the Secretary of the ITUCNW and various African recipients. The main bulk of the correspondence dates from 1931 and 1932, i.e., from the period when George Padmore was in charge of the secretariat in Hamburg.

The reference to the Negro Bureau above is somewhat confusing as there existed at various times a Negro Sub-Commission, a Negro Commission and a Negro Bureau or Section. Further confusion is added as both the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern and the RILU were to establish Negro units. Sometimes these terms were used by the authors themselves as synonyms, sometimes it is evident that there existed several units. Before the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928, reference to Negro (sub-) Commission is to a special ad hoc group which was formed to investigate a certain topic or aspect which was discussed at the World Congresses. Thus, both at the Fourth World Congress in 1922 and at the Fifth World Congress in 1924, a special (Negro) Commission were established to discuss and to prepare resolutions on the ‘Negro Question’. However, contrary to previous years, the Negro Commission at the end of the Sixth World Congress in 1928 was not dissolved but was transformed into the Negro Bureau of the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern in

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26 This file has not yet been checked by myself. Excerpts of its content is made available in Hakim Adi’s 2008 article.
December 1928. About one year later, the Bureau was renamed as Negro Section.\textsuperscript{27} The files relating to the Negro Bureau/Section of the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern are located in fond 495, delo 155.

In contrast to the Comintern, the Negro Section of the RILU was already established in July 1928. With the establishment of the (provisional) ITUCNW in 1929\textsuperscript{28}, this organization was part of the Negro Section (sometimes referred to as Negro Bureau) of the RILU. To make things more complicated, the Negro Section of the Comintern served as a kind of superstructure as members of the RILU Negro Bureau were also members of the CI/Eastern Secretariat Negro Bureau.

The evaluation of the existing ITUCNW files in Moscow opens room for a new discussion about what happened to the Hamburg files. The secretariat existed between November 1930 and early 1933. The German police raided the office twice, the first time in December 1931, when the police confiscated pamphlets and other propaganda material,\textsuperscript{29} and the second time in February 1933, resulting in the cessation of all activities in Germany. It is likely that the lost archival material in Germany contains the confiscated documents from the December 1931 raid. If this is the case, it could explain why there is a gap in the existing correspondence between late 1930 and late 1931. However, activities in Hamburg by the ITUCNW Secretary James W. Ford can be reconstructed by the various activity reports he sent to Moscow. In October 1931, Ford was replaced by George Padmore. His correspondence as secretary of the ITUCNW in Hamburg is found in Moscow, either as copies (i.e., letter sent by him) or as original letters (i.e., those he received from individuals in the African Atlantic). The main bulk of the correspondence is from late 1931 to the end of 1932. In principle, this correspondence should have been archived in Hamburg and thus would have been confiscated by the German police in March 1933 – if it still were in Hamburg! Be as it may, the end of the Padmore’s activities in Hamburg are still covered by darkness. According to his biographer, James R. Hooker, Padmore was arrested by the German police in 1933 and spent between three and six weeks in jail,

\textsuperscript{27} Davidson et alii. See further below.

\textsuperscript{28} Officially, the ITUCNW was established in Hamburg in July 1930.

\textsuperscript{29} Report by the \textit{Nachrichtenstelle im Reichsministerium des Inneren} (Surveillance Bureau of the Ministry of Interior Affairs) to the German Foreign Ministry, dated 18.2.1932, BArchB R1501/20441, Reichsministerium des Inneren, KPD – Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsbewegung, Jan. 1932 – Mai 1932, fol. 182.
although Hooker’s presentation is extremely vague on this point\textsuperscript{30}. Other researchers, such as Peter Martin, even claim that Padmore’s arrest took place as late as April 1933\textsuperscript{31}. However, both dates are too late for the end of the activities of the secretariat in Hamburg. According to the files in the Foreign Office, Padmore was deported from Germany already in late February 1933;\textsuperscript{32} according to an editorial in the \textit{Negro Worker}, Padmore had been jailed by the Nazis for about two weeks.\textsuperscript{33} If he had been taken into custody by the German police in Hamburg and held in jail for about one month or so, his arrest could have taken place as early as January 1933.

In retrospect, it is evident that the German raid in 1933 never resulted in the ‘great catch’ of communist subversive materials. Alarmed by the political development in Germany, the Comintern had outlined precautionary measures already in 1932 that included the relocation of the activities, including archives, of the WEB and other key organizations to Copenhagen and other places outside Germany. One of these organizations to be relocated to Copenhagen was the ISH, the \textit{International of Seamen and Harbour Labourers}.\textsuperscript{34} The Hamburg Secretariat of the ITUCNW was located in the same building as the ISH, and, as I claim in my study, the connection between the ISH and the ITUCNW was of vital importance throughout the early 1930s. The close cooperation between these two Comintern front organizations proved fruitful in early 1933: it is much likely that the ITUCNW archive was shipped out of Germany together with the ISH archive and ended, via Copenhagen, in Moscow.

However, the real challenge of the archival material in Moscow emerges from the particular documents. Most of the documents can easily be identified and verified, containing usually sender/author, recipient and dating. Other documents are more challenging. Draft versions off resolutions or reports are usually not signed, sometimes not even dated. The possible author and date of production can in most cases be established by focusing on the contents of document. The most challenging

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{32} TNA FO 372/2910.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Erik Nørgaard, \textit{Revolutionen der udeblev. Kominterns virksomhed med Ernst Wollweber og Richard Jensen i forgrunden}, København: Fremad 1975.
\end{itemize}
documents are letters, mostly not even in original but typewritten copies. Handwritten original letters were usually signed, in most cases by using an alias. Therefore, the first task is to create a list of all known aliases and pseudonyms that were in use at the end of the 1920s and the early 1930s. The second task is to identify the possible recipient of the letter, especially in those cases when the letter is addressed to ‘Dear Friends or Comrades’. In most cases, as noted above, one has to work with typewritten copies – it makes reading easier but identification much more difficult if the letter (or report) is not signed. Sometimes identification and validation is easy as the content of the letter (or report) gives a definite post ante quem and reference to particular events or arguments which can be checked and verified from other sources. Nevertheless, in some occasions a particular group of letters can only be identified and verified when they are taken together, as was the case in my analysis of Otto Huiswoud’s correspondence in 1935 (see CoWoPa 11/2007). The crucial point for the validation and verification of the sources, namely the identification of who wrote a particular letter or report and who was the recipient in Moscow is therefore an integral part of an actor-oriented network analysis. Or: identification and information about the potential actors and their whereabouts and networks (connections) at a certain time in a particular place enables the ‘decoding’ of the available information in Moscow.

**Actors on Stage: Identifying Key Activists, their Networks and their Whereabouts**

From the perspective of political Pan-Africanism as much as African political history, the ITUCNW almost emerges as an anomaly. During its short existence, the organization propagated a global class perspective: class, not race was the key issue. A further anomaly was the non-African composition of its core activists, i.e., all of them were members of African Diaspora. None of the key members of the organization were African-born. Instead, all of the key activists were either African American or African Caribbean radical activists who were tied to the Communist party of the United States. Thus, the ITUCNW could therefore be labelled as an organization for the ‘African toilers’ in the ‘African Atlantic’ but spearheaded by an African American and African Caribbean vanguard elite.
Throughout its existence, the inner circle of the ITUCNW comprised of a limited number of ‘core activists’, namely Otto Huiswoud, James W. Ford and George Padmore. In addition to these three key members, another group of three can be identified as being ‘outer members’ of the inner circle, including Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Harry Haywood, and William L. Patterson. Interestingly, none of them had any direct personal contacts with Sub-Saharan Africa – Huiswoud and Padmore were African Caribbeans, whereas the others were African Americans. The distinction between ‘core’ and ‘outer’ members is not merely a random one. As will be outlined in the following pages, the crucial difference between these two groups of activists was their engagement in outlining and directing the activities of the ITUCNW. Nevertheless, in as much as these activists managed the affairs of the ITUCNW, crucial political decisions had to be approved by the Comintern Apparatus, either in Hamburg, in Berlin, or, in most cases, in Moscow.

All of the above mentioned ITUCNW-activists were communists. However, each of them had a personal relationship with and position in the Party. Although the history of the ITUCNW is to a large extent the ‘rise and fall’ of George Padmore’s global engagement during the early 1930s, he was neither the first nor its last key agitator and propagator of the ITUCNW. Padmore’s period as its Secretary marks the heyday of the organization, but it was Ford, who was its first manager, and Huiswoud, who was faced with the challenge to rebuild the organization during the mid-1930s.

One way in outlining the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ core member of the ITUCNW is to focus on the relationship between the various activists and their link to the communist movement. Such a focus seeks to identify the networks of each activist. Further, focus is on the chronological order and the geographical outreach of the connections that the activist established and developed over the time. From such a perspective, a tentative interactive field of actors and their links is suggested and, as will be outlined below, Otto Huiswoud is to be put in the centre of the ‘radical arena’ that emerged after WWI in the USA.

Otto Eduard Gerardus Majella Huiswoud’s (1893-1961) position in the ITUCNW has hitherto been a neglected one. Although his role as leader of the ITUCNW after 1933 has been acknowledged in previous research, only Enckewort and Turner have highlighted his central position as one of the ‘core’ members of the
ITUCNW already during the early 1930s. Similar to many other West Indians before First World War, Huiswoud, who was born in Paramaribo, Dutch Guiana (Surinam), had illegally immigrated to the USA in 1910 in hope of a better life – but had been deeply disappointed by the overt racism in American society. Descending from a working-class background, it is perhaps not surprising that Huiswoud became politically active in the USA, first in the Socialist Propaganda League. The moving force behind the Socialist Propaganda League was the Dutch civil engineer Sebald Justinus Rutgers (1879-1961). Through him, Huiswoud got in contact with the Japanese Communist Sen Katayama (1860-1933) with who Huiswoud was to build a lasting friendship. In November 1918, Huiswoud attended a six-month Workers’ Training Course at the Rand School for Social Science; at this point, he already was a member of the Left Wing faction of the Socialist Party. After the split of the party, Huiswoud became – as the first African American – a charter member the newly formed Communist Party of America (CPA) in 1919. On June 13, 1922, Huiswoud established the West Side Harlem Branch of the Workers Party. In November 1922, Huiswoud attended as an official delegate of the Party the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow, using the alias J. Billings. Also present in Moscow was the African American poet and author Claude McKay. (Actually, he too originated from the Caribbean.) At the Congress, the two African Caribbeans/Americans made an elaborated account of the conditions of the Negro workers in the USA. He was elected Chairman of the Negro Commission, which was charged to analyze the question of the Negro workers and resulted in the drafting of the Theses on the Negro Question.

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36 However, according to Joyce Moore Turner, it is not certain if Huiswoud was involved in the Socialist Propaganda League (Turner 2005, 74).
37 Rutgers, a member of the Dutch Social Democratic Party, had settled in the USA during WWI, where he became a left-wing socialist. In late 1918 he joined the Bolshevik bureau in the USA and was a founding member of the Comintern in 1919.
38 Turner 2005, 20-22; Enckevort 2006, 249 fn 1. Sen Katayama (1859-1933) was a Japanese communist who lived between 1884-1896 and 1914-1921 in the USA. He was chief of the ‘American Bureau’ of the Comintern, became a member of the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) and stayed in the Soviet Union from 1921 until his death. Alongside Ho Chi Minh, he also served on the executive committee of the Krestintern or Peasants’ International.
39 Solomon 1998, 3, 11; Turner 2005, 24, 76. The Communist Party of America had been formed in 1919. At this point, there were two competing communist/radical socialist parties, the other one being the Communist Labor Party of America. In late 1919, the federal authorities raided Communist offices and meetings across the country. As a consequence of this, both parties went underground. In 1920, the parties were merged, and continued as United Communist Party, in 1921 renamed as Workers Party of America. In 1925, the name was changed to Workers’ (Communist) Party of America. From 1929 onward, the name was Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA).
40 As Turner notes, Huiswoud did not travel to Moscow via Shanghai, as previously has been stated by researchers, but via Berlin (Turner 2005, 100).

The Theses, together with four resolutions, were adopted unanimously by the Congress delegates. After his return to the US, via Germany and the Netherlands, in March 1923, he continued his political activities. However, although the Comintern in one of its resolutions, had charged the American Communist Party “to fight for the equality of the black and white races, for equal wages and political and social rights,” the Party remained highly inactive and designated its (few) African American members to concentrate on the work among the Negro workers. In Huiswoud’s mind, “the Negro Problem is fundamentally an economic problem but intensified by racial antagonism.” According to Huiswoud, the African American population was ruthlessly exploited; it ought to be won over to the Communist Party and their race-consciousness to be turned into class-consciousness. However, much to the dismay of Huiswoud, the party leadership did not react. For the next two years, Huiswoud’s main political platform was the African Blood Brotherhood, not the Workers (Communist) Party, although he had been appointed the first black member of the Party’s Central Executive Committee. Due to his outspoken criticism of white racism within the party, he was even suspended from the party for one year in 1924.

The African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) was a radical Black Nationalist underground organization. It had been established by the West Indian Cyril Valentine Briggs (1888-1966) in 1918 or 1919. Huiswoud, together with another West Indian radical Richard B. Moore (1893-1978), was one of its earliest members and became one of Briggs’ close collaborators during the next years. His position in the ABB was that of the National Organizing Secretary and he belonged to its Supreme

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46 According to Joyce Moore Turner, Briggs had conceived the ABB in 1919 (Turner 2005, 56). Briggs was born in St. Kitts–Nevis, Leeward Islands and had immigrated to New York in 1905. During the 1910s, he worked as a journalist and editor. In 1918, he founded his own radical journal, The Crusader, which became the organ of the ABB in 1921 but ceased its publication already in 1922.
47 Moore was born in Barbados but had immigrated to New York already in 1909. He joined the Socialist Party in 1918 and became a member of the ABB. In 1921, he left the Socialist Party and joined about one year later the Workers (Communist) Party. In 1931 Moore became vice president of the International Labor Defense (ILD), the US-branch of the International Red Aid.
48 In fact, as Joyce Moore Turner claims, Briggs, Moore, Huiswoud as well as the Jamaican-born Wilfred Adolphus Domingo (1889-1968) knew each other well already at that time and attended the meetings of the Socialist Party – although Briggs never joined the party. On the other hand, she also argues that Huiswoud had not been a member of the ABB during the formative stage of the organization but joined the Brotherhood as late as 1922 (Turner 2005, 35, 37, 57-58, 75).
Council. Unlike other Afro-American nationalist organizations, such as Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the ABB program combined Black nationalism with social radicalism. It had been fairly successful in gathering radical elements within its orbit, albeit never had a large membership.\(^49\) During its early years of existence, the ABB sought to collaborate with Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The affirmation between the two organizations ended in 1921 when the UNIA expelled the ABB due to the latter’s political extremism. Thereafter, the ABB leadership concentrated itself in criticizing Garvey and the UNIA, rejected Garvey’s racial separatism and established close relationships with the Workers’ (Communist) Party.\(^50\) By 1922, if not earlier, Briggs and Moore had also joined the Workers’ Party.\(^51\) Thereafter, the three West Indians constantly reminded the Party leadership about its failure to undertake any serious political and organizational work among the African American population. The ABB, on the other hand, was transformed into a front organization of the Party and the Harlem Branch of the Party was affiliated to the ABB.\(^52\)

Another early black radical and member of the Communist Party was the Dallas-born Lovett Fort-Whiteman (1889-1939), who was a Tuskegee-trained Marxist, with whom both Huiswoud and Briggs initially cooperated. Fort-Whiteman’s political career had started in March 1915 when he experienced the Mexican revolution in Yucatán and became a self-described syndicalist and socialist. In 1917, he returned via Cuba and Canada to the USA and settled in New York. Here, he encountered


\(^{51}\) It is somewhat unclear when Briggs and Moore joined the Communist Party. According to Turner, both Briggs and Moore listed among the officers of the West Side Harlem Branch of the Workers Party in 1922. However, as Turner notes, it is much likely that Briggs, at least, had joined the Party some years earlier (Turner 2005, 86-87). Solomon claims that Briggs had committed himself to the communist movement by 1921 (Solomon 1998, 20). On Richard B. Moore’s sojourn from socialism to communism, see John M. McClendon, “Richard B. Moore, radical politics, and the Afro-American history movement: the formation of a revolutionary tradition in African American intellectual culture,” in: Afro-Americans in New York Life and History, July 2006.

\(^{52}\) Turner 2005, 89.
Huiswoud (?) and Sen Katayama at New York’s Rand School of Social Science. Later in the same year, he joined the Socialist Party of New York. After the war, Fort-Whiteman joined the ABB, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Communist Labour Party (CLA) in 1919. In February 1924, Huiswoud attended the (First) All-Race Conference or Negro Sanhedrin in Chicago as an ABB delegate, whereas Fort-Whiteman participated as delegate of the Workers Party. Later in the same year in mid-June, Fort-Whiteman went to Moscow where he participated – using the alias James Jackson – at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern and was a member of the Negro Propaganda Commission. Huiswoud did not go to Moscow in 1924. The sole reason for this must have been his one-year suspension from the party in mid-1924. Fort-Whiteman was to stay in Russia for nine months, being enrolled as a student at the University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV).

When Fort-Whiteman returned to the USA during spring 1925, he had been given two tasks. The first was to recruit other African Americans to study and work in Moscow, the second was to establish a new radical Black platform in the USA with the backing of the Comintern, the African Negro Labor Congress (ANLC). He was successful in his first assignment and succeeded in recruiting three black women and seven black men to the KUTV, including Otto Hall (alias Carl or John Jones) and Bankole Awoonor Renner. The second mission turned out to be much more challenging.

Fort-Whiteman had envisioned the ANLC to become an interracial nondiscriminatory trade union movement which would unite black and white workers and farmers together. Even more, his vision was that the movement would become a global organization that would rally Africans, African Americans and African Caribbeans in the struggle against ‘world imperialism’. As the ABB was regarded to be a too narrow organization and was believed to have lost its momentum, it was

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53 Fort-Whiteman was enrolled in the Rand School’s full-time program in 1917-1918, one earlier than Huiswoud. Although it is uncertain, if he and Huiswoud met already at the Rand School, both belonged to the Socialist Party. (Turner 2005, 52, 75.)
disbanded by orders of the Workers (Communist) Party to be amalgamated into the ANLC – much to the dismay of Briggs. Despite personal animosities between Fort-Whiteman and Briggs, the ANLC and especially its publications, *The Negro Champion* and its successor *The (Negro/Harlem) Liberator*, were to emerge as the central mouthpiece of Black radicalism during the latter half of the 1920s in the USA. However, due to failure of the ANLC to rally behind itself the southern African American working class, Fort-Whiteman lost his influence and, from 1926, the organization was controlled by Briggs and Moore. Although Briggs and Moore worked with the ANLC, the former as editor of the ANLC journal *The Negro Champion*, the latter as general secretary and national organizer, the relationship between them and Fort-Whiteman remained uneasy. Briggs had been critical about the disbandment of the ABB, whereas Moore’s appointment was due to ECCI interference after Moscow had fired the organizer Fort-Whiteman had appointed. Fort-Whiteman himself had soon thereafter left the ANLC leadership. In spring 1927, Moore took over the ANLC. Despite Moore’s attempt to reactivate the ANLC by moving its headquarters from Chicago to Harlem in 1927, the organization further stagnated and was dissolved in November 1930 and replaced by the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR).

Throughout its short existence, the ANLC never succeeded in coordinating and influencing other organizations or in rallying the masses of the African American toilers. Although the ANLC claimed in 1927 that it had forty-five chapters throughout the country, its main strongholds were Chicago and Harlem. Nevertheless, the ANLC was to rally behind itself young potential activists and a younger generation of African American communists, such as Harry Haywood. In Chicago, Fort-Whiteman had been able to attract James W. Ford to the organization, whereas in Harlem the ANLC had been able to recruit a law student named Malcolm Meredith Nurse.

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58 Published in New York from 1925 to 1928.
Harry Haywood (1898-1985) was born Heywood Hall in South Omaha, Nebraska. Before joining the army in 1917, he had worked as a dining-car waiter. Haywood, too, experienced the West Front in France. Back in the USA, he was recruited to the ABB by his older brother Otto Hall. In 1925, Harry Haywood joined the Workers (Communist) Party and participated for a short period in the activities of the ANLC. One year later, he was sent for study to Moscow, first at the KUTV and from 1927 the Lenin School. He participated at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, and under the tutelage of Nikolai (Charles) Nasanov, Haywood became the major American champion of the ‘Black Belt theses’ (see further below). In November 1930, Haywood returned to the USA where he became the Party’s chief theoretician on the Negro question.

James W. Ford (1893-1957) was born in Pratt City, Alabama. In his youth, he went to work on the railroad and continued working through high school. In 1913 he entered Fisk University in Nashville. As an army enlistee, he fought in France in World War I. After the war, he moved to Chicago where he worked for the postal service and became a union activist. He was one of the few Black union activists that Lovett Fort-Whiteman was to enlist in the ANLC in 1925. One year later, in 1926, Ford joined the Communist Party in Chicago. Thereafter, his rise in the Party hierarchy was rapid. Having experience of trade union work, he was nominated as US delegate to the Fourth Congress of the Red International Labour Union (RILU) which was held in March-April 1928 in Moscow. At the RILU Congress, he was selected to its executive committee. Ford stayed in Russia for the next nine months and attended the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, held from July to September 1928.

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62 Otto Hall, too, was a member of the ABB and ANLC as well as the Workers’ Party. In 1925, he was sent to Moscow to study at the KUTV.
Malcolm Ivan Meredith Nurse alias George Padmore (1900-1959) was born in Trinidad.\textsuperscript{66} He had a middle-class background, and worked in the early 1920s as a journalist. In 1924, Nurse left the island and went to the USA. His intention was to study medicine but shifted to study law and enrolled at Fisk University in 1925. In the following year, he shifted to the Law School at University of New York and, in 1927, to Howard University. While at Fisk, he established contacts with Nnamdi Azikiwe, a Nigerian student, whom he met again at Howard. During a visit of the British Ambassador to Howard University, Nurse – under cover of his \textit{nom de guerre} – Padmore embarrassed the dignitary by publicly protesting against the suffering of Africa under British rule.\textsuperscript{67} Not surprisingly, Nurse was expelled from the university. Nevertheless, the incident marked a watershed in Nurse’s life. Living in New York, he started to engage with radical African Americans in Harlem, among others Richard B. Moore and Otto Huiswoud, joined the Workers’ Party in 1927, and became an active member of the Harlem Tenants League (HTL). The HTL was organized by Moore in January 1928 and was one of the few active ANLC units apart from the local branch in Chicago. HTL secretary was Otto Huiswoud’s wife Hermina Dumont Huiswoud (1905-1998). In fact, according to Hermina Huiswoud-Dumont, it was her idea to give Nurse the pseudonym George Padmore, a name which he was to use in the Communist milieu in the US and Europe, eventually identifying with the name.\textsuperscript{68}

Huiswoud also knew William L. Patterson (1891-1980), who was already a well-known attorney in New York during the 1920s. Patterson was born in San Francisco, studied at the University of California and had received an LL.B. from Hastings College of Law in 1919 but failed the bar exam. At time, he joined the NAACP. He went to London in the same year, where he met George Lansbury and other leading figures of the Labour Party. In London, he was toying with the idea of immigrating to Liberia, but was convinced by Lansbury to return to the USA. After his return, he settled in New York in 1920 where he began practicing law and,\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{66} None of Padmore’s biographers have dwelled about the question of his language skills. However, there are reasons to believe that Padmore mastered French or at least the French creole which was the lingua franca of the native Trinidadians. This could explain Padmore’s friendship with the Malian radical activist Garan Kouryate who – presumably – did not speak English.


together with two friends, opened a law office in Harlem in 1923. He went to Boston with an International Labor Defense (ILD) delegation to protest the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927. The ILD was the US section of the International Red Aid (IRA)\(^69\). This organization, which is often referred to by its Russian acronym, MOPR, was a central part of the Comintern-Apparatus; it had been created in 1922 and had its headquarters in Berlin. After the experience in Boston, Patterson became politically active and joined the Workers’ Party in 1927. He was almost immediately selected to attend the KUTV, and left for Moscow in late 1927.\(^70\) He arrived just before the Sixth Congress,\(^71\) which he attended using the pseudonym *William Wilson*, and remained in Russia until 1931. After his return to the USA, he became the executive director of the ILD in 1932 and took over direction of its campaign to save the Scottsboro Boys.\(^72\)

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 is generally seen as a turning point in the history of communist engagement in the ‘Negro Problem’ – not only in the USA but on a global scale. Of the above-mentioned African Americans, all but Huiswoud, Padmore, Briggs and Moore either went to Moscow or were already staying there. By that time, Huiswoud and Moore had obtained high positions in the CPUSA – Huiswoud had been assigned as organizer for the Buffalo (Western New York) district, and Moore had been placed as New England organizer for the International Labor Defense.\(^73\) By October 1928, the Political Commission (Polcom) of the Party appointed Huiswoud head of its Negro Department and to represent the National Negro Committee on the Polcom; in March 1929, four African Americans, namely Huiswoud, Otto Hall, Briggs and John Henry, were elected to the Central Executive Committee of the Party.\(^74\)

\(^{69}\) [http://marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/ild.html](http://marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/ild.html).


\(^{71}\) Haywood 1978, 253.

\(^{72}\) Haywood 1978, 253.


\(^{74}\) Turner 2005, 162, 171.
The decade following the end of the First World War was to emerge as the beginning of a new global era. In 1919, none of the above mentioned African Americans and African Caribbeans were ‘thinking globally’; by 1929, all of them were ‘acting globally’ and were deeply involved in shaping an alternative agenda for international solidarity. In the USA, traumatic experiences of the African American soldiers on the West Front combined with the blatant race discrimination in the American society radicalized, if not frustrated, African American war veterans in post-war US society. America had never been a utopia for people of ‘Black’ colour, but African Americans where deeply split about their position and future in the USA. Should one accommodate to white society, as the moderate ‘Black’ intelligentsia, among other Booker T. Washington, had argued? Or should one be conscious of the ‘Color Bar’ – but which consequences was one to take from such a position? Opposing and changing the system from within, separating oneself from it or, as an ultimate cause, emigrate to Africa? American society was permeated by race discriminations and white chauvinism, both in the North and in the South of the US. In the Southern states, disfranchisement, race segregation, lynching and discrimination were an integral part of an oppressive racial system that aimed to deny the African American population its fundamental political and societal rights. Here, in the states of the Old Confederacy as well as in the border states of Kentucky, Oklahoma, Maryland and Delaware, some 9 million African Americans lived, most of them as sharecroppers in 1920. The situation was slightly better in the North, where some 1.5 million African Americans lived, with its absence of legal racial discrimination and Jim Crowism, resulting in the migration of over one million southern African Americans to the North during the 1910s and 1920s, known as the Great Migration.75

Nevertheless, neither was the North a ‘heaven’ for African Americans. Chicago was to have the largest concentration of an African American working class. Prior to the war, African Americans were not part of the industrial labour force but were employed mainly in the domestic or personal service occupations. At the outbreak of the war, this situation underwent drastic changes as African Americans were needed to fill the labour vacuum caused by the war boom and the lack of white (cheap)

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75 Gilmore 2008, 30.
labour. Consequently, Chicago’s employers turned to the Southern states in order to tap the reservoir of African American labour. During the war, the African American population of Chicago doubled from 50,000 to 100,000; a similar process occurred in other industrial centres in the North. Harlem in New York, with its about 175,000 African Americans inhabitants, most of them Southern immigrants, emerged as the largest concentrations of ‘black’ people in the world and, in the 1920s, became the centre of the ‘New Negro Movement’ or ‘Harlem Renaissance’

However, in Chicago, the immigration of unskilled African Americans to the North was to cause tension between the white low-paid working-class of Southern and Eastern European immigrants and African Americans. While the white working class was politically organized and backed by its labour unions, the African Americans were not. Quite to the contrary: unskilled African Americans were used by the employers both to break labour union activities and strikes as well as to keep wages low while production was booming.

Not surprisingly, the African American working class was viewed with suspicion by the white working class, who rather perceived the African Americans as rivals than participants in a common cause. Political radicalism in terms of socialist and working class movements was at this point a ‘white man’s domain’ and this position left its imprint on both the labour unions and the communist movement in the USA during the 1920s.

The situation escalated during the ‘Red Summer’ of 1919 when a white mock attacked African American war veterans in Chicago. What followed was a racial massacre. Race disturbances and riots soon erupted across over the country, followed by waves of lynching and federal oppression against the rioters. However, the situation did not calm down. While white American society was entering the era of ‘good feelings’, little changed for the African American population. Another wave of race riots, this time starting in Tulsa, Oklahoma, followed in 1921. By this time, the ‘Negro Problem’ or ‘Negro Question’ was not anymore a national one – its existence was to be put on the international agenda by the Comintern.

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77 Haywood 1978, 84-88.
78 On the radicalization of the African American working class, see further Solomon 1998 and Gilmore 2008.
80 Race riots shattered, among others, Washington, D.C., Charleston, Knoxville and Omaha from June to September 1919.
The condition of the African Caribbean population in the West Indies was different in comparison to the USA. The abolishment of slavery in the British, French, Dutch and Spanish colonies during the nineteenth century had resulted in the emergence of a ‘creole’ society. Although the African Caribbean population constituted the absolute majority on all islands, their political, economic and social influence was weak. Most inhabitants on the islands were sharecroppers and formed a ‘Black’ agricultural working class. In addition, a small African Caribbean middle-class had emerged. Still, by the early twentieth century, the colonial system held the islands in its firm grip through its age-old structures and political influence was confined to the ruling class of European colonial administrators and white creoles. Thus, whereas there existed, in principle, no ‘color bar’ in the Caribbean, African Caribbeans were blocked from participating in political decision making due to their slave descent and societal status rather than race.81

In contrast to the situation in the USA, with its rising amount of African American political activities and currents, political agitation in the Caribbean had not resulted in a transition from a notion of shared experiences to conscious expression. Most African Caribbeans identified themselves first and foremost as inhabitants of a particular island and, by extension, as subjects of the British, French or Dutch colonial empire.82 Only a few Caribbean intellectuals, such as C.L.R. James, tried to establish a race conscious, emancipatoric tradition that rested on the shared experience of resistance against slavery, slave rebellion and the struggles of self-emancipated maroon societies.83 As Joyce Moore Turner notes, racial discrimination in the USA radicalized Caribbean immigrants as they came to realize that they shared the same fate as the African American population. In the USA, and to a lesser extent also in Britain, African Caribbeans were transformed from ‘Jamaicans’ or ‘Barbarians’ to ‘West Indians’, and were classified as ‘negroes’ rather than Caribbean immigrants. The exposure to blatant racism in the USA opened the way for Caribbean immigrants to seek a solution to their as well as their fellow African American

82 According to Winston James (1998, 108), the black masses in the British, French or Dutch Caribbean “always viewed the metropolitan center, and the monarchy in particular, as bulwarks against the tyranny of officialdom and the tender mercies of the local oligarchy who vigorously opposed their emancipation.”
exploitation and to look at the socialist ideas that promised the future of just and equal society. Eventually, their protest merged with that of citizens born in the USA and became the voice of the African American rather than the voice of Caribbean Americans.84

Whereas the 1920s saw the emergence of a new generation of African American intellectuals and their search for a ‘New Negro’, African Caribbean intellectuals were to start their journey to discover the roots of rejecting slavery and colonial oppression. The experience of Maroon societies and their African-cum-Caribbean Creole society as well as the ‘Black Jacobins’ and their fight for racial equality, freedom and brotherhood in the late eighteenth century inspired C.L.R. James and others to vision a new world, a better life and just existence for the down-trodden in the African Diaspora. Echoes of these voices were also heard among the (British) West and South African intelligentsia who, together with those in the Americas and the Caribbean, formed an amorphous group of intellectuals and activists in the ‘Black Atlantic’.85

But who where these intellectuals and activists? In the USA, most of them were politically motivated artists and journalists, some publishers and lawyers but also ordinary toilers and labour union activists. As in the Caribbean, few of them were farmers or share-croppers. In British West Africa, their common nominator was that they belonged to the Western-educated middle-class of lawyers and journalists. Similar to the USA, African workers in South Africa were drawn to this group – and on similar grounds, namely race discrimination and segregation. A fifth group of activists – one that is mostly forgotten – was the endless number of African seamen who sailed under appalling conditions on European and American ships. Little is known of this group of potential radicals, apart that they were to serve as the link between Hamburg, Marseilles and London and the rest of the Atlantic world during the early 1930s.

In North America and in British West Africa the ‘new’ intelligentsia was in part an outcome of a generational and structural conflict. In the USA, the ‘new’ or ‘younger’ intellectuals positioned themselves against the ‘older’ generation of African American politicians and activists, such as Booker T. Washington, who had

84 Turner 2005, 42. On the role and influence of African Caribbean immigrants in socialist, communist and nationalist struggles in the USA, see further James 1998.
advocated the assimilation of the African American population into American society. In British West Africa, and to a lesser extent also in French West Africa, the colonial system had been built on the close cooperation between the ‘old’ ruling classes or ‘traditional’ rulers, the so-called Native Authorities. Modern political activism, as compared to traditional, precolonial one, had emerged in West African coastal societies already during the nineteenth century. Starting in Freetown in Sierra Leone, in Monrovia in Liberia, in Lagos in Nigeria and in Cape Coast on the Gold Coast, the Western-educated elite, which included merchants, lawyers, journalists, teachers and medical doctors, saw themselves more of members of an Atlantic civilization, as equals to Europeans and Americans and as the spearheads for a new, modern African civilization. They sent their sons, and sometimes even their daughters, to England and to the USA for education and established trade and intellectual links that criss-crossed the Atlantic. However, the heyday of the new West African elite came to an end with the transformation from ‘informal’ to ‘formal’ empire: the West African middlemen were squeezed out of business by the 1870s and, with the establishment of colonial rule, were regarded by the colonial authorities more as a nuisance than potential allies. The colonial system disguised itself as a discriminating one with respect to the Western-educated coastal elite. However, as much as British (or any other colonial state in West Africa) colonialism was politically biased, it needed the local and traditional rulers who, if they cooperated, were regarded as minor equals, sometimes been even titled as ‘kings’, always as local authorities. Consequently, the Western-educated coastal elite found themselves humiliated and in opposition not only to the colonial but also the traditional authorities and rulers.86

Overt racial discrimination was seldom articulated in British West Africa although many of the European colonial authorities little tried to hide their race prejudices and their viewpoints of African inferiority and backwardness. In the West African colonies, and in contrast to the situation in South Africa, the European population was but a tiny fraction of the total African population; discrimination was in most cases politically motivated. As a consequence, therefore, anticolonial sentiments were largely about the critique of political issues, first and foremost

concerning political representation. This question emerged during the early twentieth century as being the first and foremost one. In the British West African colonies, this resulted in a clash between the ‘old’, traditional elite and the ‘new’, Western-educated one. As the colonial authorities had allied themselves with the ‘old’ elite, the ‘new’ one perceived itself to be both betrayed and side-stepped: their centuries-old orientation towards Western civilization and ‘modernization’ had been ‘sacrificed’ on the altar of colonial Realpolitik. However, from the perspective of the colonial authorities, this change in policy was logic: almost all colonial subjects were tied in one or another way to the ‘traditional’ sector, especially in terms of land ownership. The ownership of land, it was declared not only in the British but also in the other West African colonies, was wrested in the hands of the Native Authorities; it was communal and could not be private. Thus, in an agrarian society as in West Africa those who controlled the land controlled its inhabitants. The coastal elite lacked any traditional authority.87

By the early twentieth century, the frustration of the coastal elite became politically articulated. Being part of an African Atlantic network, they communicated with political activists and were to establish transnational intellectual networks. When political Pan-Africanism started to gain momentum in the northern Atlantic world, in the USA and among people of African descent in the United Kingdom, leading (Anglophone) West African coastal intellectuals had little difficulties to link up with the vision of transnational political agitation for a common cause.88 As in the USA, returning – and frustrated – African soldiers who had fought in allied armies in various campaigns in Africa and Europe further fuelled the critique against the colonial system. If the ‘imperial’ moment in Sub-Saharan Africa prior to the First World War had been the zenith of the White race and European civilization – Africa was the ‘dark, backward and barbarian continent’, European colonization was to bring ‘peace, law and order’ – the meaningless massacre in the trenches on the West Front, the clash between ‘white’ civilizations and races was to be the antitheses of Western civilization. The worst betrayal in the eyes of the returning soldiers was the lie of


equality: promises of independence, equality and a ‘New World Order’ were not to include Africa (or Asia).

In South Africa, on the other hand, a different political situation had emerged by the early twentieth century. British imperialism had failed to force the Boer republics into its dominance, had fought a war against them and, as a compromise and to soften Boer resentment, established the South African Union in 1910. The outcome of the Union was, eventually, a victory for the Boers and their racial system of rule: Union legislation was to follow the path of racial segregation – although racial discrimination had been part and parcel in South Africa in British controlled already before 1910. Politically and racially, the African population was designated to constitute second, if not third class subjects, and were denied any political rights. At the same time the South African economy was booming, especially the mining sector, resulting in a racially divided working class: a (relatively) better-paid White working class and a poorly paid Black working class. The Black working class was further split on geographical terms: the majority of the Black miners and labourers were migrant labourers from neighbouring colonies who lacked any rights at all. Migrant labourers were hired by the mining companies, they were denied any rights outside the mining camps and in the mines their only right was to receive a nominal salary – if they had met their quotas.

The post-war economic depression in the Atlantic world was a blow to South African economy. As in the USA, the economic hardship that followed was to radicalize the working-class and labour union movements as well as to bring racialism to the forefront. African workers counted less than those of European descent. Even worse, African toilers were seen as the competitors, not fellows, of the White working class. In the rest of the African continent, the colonial system had revealed its Janus face by 1920. Slavery, although officially abolished, had been replaced by conscripted, forced and ‘political’ labour. The African agricultural sector bore in all colonies the main burden of taxation, European trade companies being mostly exempted. Imported consumer goods were heavily taxed with duties. The main, if not sole, emphasize of the colonial economy was on the export sector – to the sole benefit of the European merchants and companies. In sum: Africans were denied political

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89 Boele van Hensbroeck 1999; Derrick 2008, 56-57.
rights and were rejected the capacity to economic and societal self-determination. The colonial state and the European companies needed unskilled farm and mine workers, not potentially unruly subjects, and consequently both the educational as well as the social welfare sector in the colonies was utterly neglected.91

Nevertheless, it were not the atrocities of the colonial system in Africa – the ‘Red Rubber’ in Leopold’s Congo, the mass killing of the Hereros in German South-West Africa or the humiliating conditions in the plantations and mines in many of the colonies – who served as a trigger for a global African reaction but the experiences of racism and denial of humanity which Africans outside the continent in the African Diaspora had experienced. Political Pan-Africanism tried to unify the American, the Caribbean and the African worlds of the ‘Black’ Atlantic and to establish a common political agenda based on race and heritage. The movement was a distinct intellectual movement during much of the early twentieth century.92 Interestingly, there was little, if any focus on the African Brazilian population or on the African Muslim population. In retrospect, this lack of emphasize reveals the Anglophone bias of political Pan-Africanism. The early key propagators of the Pan-African movement were to a large extent African Americans, the key idea of a unified African movement was more a reflection of the dilemma of those of the African Diaspora than those who were living in Africa93. Some Africans from Francophone African colonies, such as Blaise Diagne, were to emerge as prominent members of the Pan-African movement, but they were a tiny minority. Few, if any, African Muslims ever participated in the early Pan-African Congresses and neither had the leading Pan-Africanists any interest in engaging them in the movement. Political Pan-Africanism, it seemed in the eyes of the radical African American intelligentsia, by the 1920s, was a bourgeoisie intellectual movement which had little interest towards the masses and their plight in the Black Atlantic. In their view, a total different approach had to be taken if one wanted to challenge to racial and the colonial system, namely one that would engage the masses of downtrodden toilers and agricultural workers. The question was where to start, how to articulate the goals and, most importantly, who was to take the leading role in the new movement?

91 Feinstein 2005.
Not surprisingly, it was the generation that had rallied behind the call for ‘the New Negro’ in the USA and beyond who were the self-proclaimed leaders of a global radical African anticolonial and national movement as much as they were pushed by outsiders – not lest in Moscow – to take a leading role. The common nominator of all those individuals who were caught up in the orbit of radical Pan-Africanism-cum-Communism was them being what Ira Berlin calls an Atlantic Creole, i.e., persons who by their personal experiences had become part of the three worlds that comprised the cosmopolitan Atlantic littoral.94 By 1928 some of them had moved away from the USA, by 1930 most of them were engaged in establishing transnational, if not global networks.

I. Background: The Communist International and the ’Negro Question’

Africa was never a central focal point of the strategic considerations and tactical manoeuvres of the interwar world communist movement. For most of the period, world proletarian revolution was believed to be the achievement of a working class movement in the industrial countries of the Western world. Outside Europe and North America, the existence of a working class movement in America and Asia, especially in Mexico, China and India, were regarded by Communist intellectuals and agitators as promising hotbeds for a future spread of the international class-struggle. In the vocabulary of Lenin and other communist theoreticians, the radicalization of the working class in countries defined as ‘semi-colonial’, such as India and China, could be achieved with the support of the world communist movement. Practical agitation and orientation was to be coordinated through the Third (Communist) International or the Comintern with its headquarters in Moscow. Countries lacking a substantial working class, such as the African colonies, posed a problem for the Comintern: with whom should one cooperate? Only the Union of South Africa, which by the early 1920s was the most industrialized and urbanized country on the continent, was to receive some interest by Moscow. In South Africa the Comintern leadership noticed the potentials for communist agitation: on here existed a developed, numerous and well-organized urban working class.95

However, as in the USA, blatant racism and segregation also marked South African realities. Not surprisingly, therefore, the US and the South African situation were usually discussed in Moscow as being two cases of the same problem. Last, but not least from the perspective of the radicalization of the African Atlantic, how should one analyze the situation and condition of the African Americans? Were they to be included in considerations concerning the question of self-determination of nations, as hinted in Stalin’s study ‘Marxism and the National Question’ from 1913, or was the ‘Negro Question’ part of the Colonial Question, as outlined in Lenin’s ‘Theses on the National and Colonial Questions’ from 1920? In sum: were the discussions concerning the ‘Negro Question’ limited to focussing on the USA only or did they envisage a global African Atlantic solution?

95 Davidsson et alii 2003, 2-3.
World revolution was expected by Russian Bolsheviks and European radicals to spread from Russia to Germany and the rest of Europe at the end of the First World War. But despite a promising beginning in late 1918, nothing came out of it and soon radical socialist groups, who in many European countries had broken away from the Socialist party and formed various Workers or Communist parties, found themselves in a minority position. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia, too, was facing severe challenges both from within the country and by a hostile international community. Not surprisingly, therefore, the main concern of the first world congresses of the 1919-established Third (Communist) International or the Comintern was directed to establishing and strengthening discipline within world communist movement, including setting the rules for admission to the Comintern as well as the structures of command and communication between the centre (Moscow) and each national member party.\footnote{A good outline of the volatile situation in post-war Europe is provided by Zara Steiner, The Lights that Failed. European International History 1919-1933 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005. On the early phase of the spread of world communism, see Robert Service, Comrades! A History of World Communism, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2007.}

By 1923, if not earlier, it had become evident for most of the Bolsheviks that the conditions for a proletarian world revolution in post-war Europe had faded away. As Aleksandr Valtin puts it, from this period onward, there was a fundamental change in Soviet approach towards the Comintern: from the prism of world revolution to one of Soviet state interests\footnote{Alexandr Valtin, “The Theory and Practice of World Revolution in the Perception of Inter-war Europe. An attempt at a Historical Generalisation,” in: Politics and Society under the Bolsheviks. Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, 1995, eds. Kevin McDermott and John Morison, London and New York: MacMillan 1999, 245-250.}. Focus was on the defence of the Russian revolution and the Soviet state. A constant fear of being surrounded and besieged by bourgeois enemies shattered the minds of the Bolsheviks, in their minds, the Capitalist world just waited for an excuse to attack the Soviet Union. As Wilson argues, communist anxiety over the war issue fulfilled several functions. Not only did it act as a catalyst in directing Comintern attention to the colonial world, but it contributed significantly to the Comintern’s belief that both the colonial and the Negro questions were directly related to the security of the Soviet state. Pressure on the Soviet state could be relieved as much as the capitalist world economy could be challenged and conditions for a truly world revolution could be set if the communists were able to expand their agitation and activities to the colonies. As a consequence, insurrectionary work in the
colonies were stressed in early Comintern guidelines, including the ‘Program of the Communist International’ and the ‘Theses on the Struggle against War Danger’.  

Asian communists, such as the Indian Mandendra Nath Roy (1887-1948) and the Vietnamese Ho Chi-Minh (1890-1969), were the most outspoken in their critique against the lack of interest in the colonial question and racial approach to the plight of the non-Western world by the Comintern during the early 1920s. In fact, the Third World Congress of the Comintern in 1921, which initiated the policy of a ‘united front’ or collaboration with the Social Democrats in Europe, totally neglected the potentials of a revolution in the colonies – a decision which was heavily criticized by Roy and lead to his subsequent rift with Lenin.

Lenin had argued in favour of communist support to colonial emancipation both at the Second Comintern Congress in 1920 and the Third Comintern Congress in 1921. However, for practical reasons, the active promotion of communist agitation in the colonies was to be the task of the European communist parties. However, as Wilson notes, most Bolsheviks and European Communists still regarded Europe as being the centre for the coming world revolution and therefore tended to view the colonies, especially the African ones, merely as sidetracks of their activities during the early 1920s. Only the French Communist Party (PCF) did make some practical movements in establishing a Colonial Commission in 1922 and made some efforts in establishing revolutionary cells in the North African colonies. By 1924, the PCF, at least in theory, was totally committed to the principles of total emancipation for the French colonies. In line with earlier Comintern resolutions, the PCF dedicated itself to struggle against the conscription of colonial inhabitants in the French colonial army, especially the enlistment of Africans, and the deployment of colonial troops in Europe. The expansion of communist activities into sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, was erratic and largely nonexistent at that time. In contrast to the French, the British Communist Party (CPGB), although in theory sympathetic for the aspirations

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98 Wilson 1974, 163-164.  
99 Roy, whose real name was Nurendranath Bhattacharia, was a representative of the Mexican Communist Party at the Second Comintern Congress.  
100 According to Comintern vocabulary, the united front was an attempt to conduct a joint struggle with all other workers, either belonging to other parties and groups, or belonging to no party, in the name of the defence of the interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie.  
101 Roy repeated his criticism against the ‘united front’ policy at the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922 as well as at the Fifth Congress in 1924, protesting against the collaboration with bourgeois nationalist movements. Kanet 1966, 71-72.
of colonial nationalism, had been passive and had done almost nothing in praxis by 1924.102

The question of Comintern interest in the colonial question arose again at the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern in 1924. Ho Chi-Minh, among others, complained about the Western bias of Comintern policy and other Asian delegates criticized Grigory Yevseievich Zinoviev (1883-1936), the Chairman of the Comintern,103 for not having given enough attention to the colonial and semi-colonial countries in his report. In the same vein, the British, French and Italian communist parties were accused of neglecting the anticolonial struggle in the colonies.104 Roy and the Russian communist Dmitry Zakharovich Manuilsky (1883-1959) ended up in a fierce debate concerning the engagement of the Comintern with bourgeois anticolonial movements. Manuilsky, who mainly repeated Stalin’s and Lenin’s earlier positions, argued for the right of self-determination for nations and underlined that the national and colonial could not be separated. Following Stalin and Lenin, Manuilsky emphasized the necessity of colonialism for the continued existence of capitalism and the impossibility of a true victory of the European proletariat without the emancipation of the colonies. Consequently – and in contrast to Roy – he called for the wholehearted support by the communists of those national liberation movements which would weaken imperialism, bourgeois included.105

Despite the early anticolonial intentions of the Comintern, communist agitation in African Atlantic was slow to take momentum. Instead, Asian and the Middle East were given prominence when the Comintern’s colonial strategy was outlined. Although the colonial question was debated during the first congresses of the Comintern, most notably at the First Congress of Peoples of the East held in Baku in

102 Wilson 1974, 136-141; Sherwood 1996, 140, 143. For a critical discussion about Sherwood’s claim of racist attitudes within the CPGB and its lack of interest on work in the British African colonies, see John Callaghan, “Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-war Years,” Science & Society 61: 4, Winter 1997-1998, 513-525. However, despite Callaghan strong criticism against many of Sherwood’s arguments, his in not able to refute her – as well as Wilson’s an others – demonstration of the lack of engagement on behalf of the CPGB before the mid-1920s.
103 Zinoviev, whose real name was Hirsch Apfelbaum, was the Chairman of the Comintern and a member of the Presidium of the Comintern between 1921 and 1926.
105 Kanet 1966, 73-77.
September 1920\textsuperscript{106}, not much had been achieved before 1922. Neither had the oppression of the African Americans, which was first addressed by the American journalist and socialist John Reed (1887-1920) in his speech at the Second World Congress of the Comintern in 1919, received much attention until 1922 when Otto Huiswoud and Claude McKay participated in the drafting of the ‘Theses on the Negro Question’ at the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern which was held in late 1922.\textsuperscript{107}

The Fourth Comintern Congress adopted the first resolution that dedicated the international communist movement to the task of promoting revolution among the world’s black population. Although the plight of the Africans in the colonies was acknowledged, their political readiness for revolution was unclear, especially as seen from the perspective of Moscow there was not much of an African working class – apart from South Africa, where a communist party had been founded as early as 1921\textsuperscript{108}. The African continent and the African people, the Theses declared, had been humiliated and oppressed by imperialism, colonialism and capitalism and continued to be so in the postwar world of accelerated British, French and US investments in the African colonies. Little more was said about the African situation. However, as noted in the ‘Theses’, a total different situation existed in the USA with its large African American working class, and most of the sections of the Theses were therefore especially devoted to the situation in the USA. Apart from the history of slavery, oppression and racism, recent political developments, especially the persecutions of the African Americans and the following violent clashes in the postwar US, and the emergence of a Black working class in the North, were interpreted as ‘positive signs’ for the beginning of the political mobilization of the African Americans. Eventually, this struggle was to result in “black liberation.” However, the crux of the matter was whether or not the ‘Negro Question’ was to be regarded as a class or a race question. Huiswoud and the Comintern stressed the former position. Hence, the ‘Negro Question’ was, first and foremost, to concentrate on agitation among the African

\textsuperscript{106} This Congress was devoted primarily to the question of anti-colonial work in Asia and the Muslim world, although thoughts about staging Bolshevik activities in Africa were also discussed. See further Wilson 1974, 124-125.


\textsuperscript{108} Davidson et alii 2003, 11. In Egypt, too, a communist party was formed in 1921. However, the party was short-lived and was dissolved in 1924.
American working class and to “fight for the racial equality of blacks and whites, for equal wages and equal and social rights.”

Despite the relatively general attention to the conditions in Africa, the 1922 Theses outlined an African Atlantic dimension to the international struggle against capitalism and imperialism. The theses called for the formation of an international black movement to be organised to join the four corners of the African Atlantic world: in America, hailed as the centre of black culture and black protest, in (sub-Saharan) Africa, portrayed as the reserve of human labour for the further development of capitalism, in Central America and the Caribbeans, which countries and islands lingered under the joke of US capitalism and imperialism, and South Africa, the Congo and East Africa, where anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement were said to be in the making. Already in the draft version had Huiswoud called for a World Negro Congress or international black conference to be held in Moscow. Further, there was a radical Pan-African undertone in the document. Similar to other calls for the liberation of the African race, the 1922 Theses highlighted the leading role of the African Americans in the global struggle against colonialism and claimed that the African Americans, due to their dual historical experience of racism and Western civilization, were to be the “historical leaders of their comrades in Africa.”

However, much to the dismay of Huiswoud and other African American communists, the recommendations of the 1922 Comintern Congress received little attention in the USA. The leadership of the Workers’ Party or the unions did not devote much energy in engaging the African American workers; neither was there much interest in Moscow in organizing a world congress to discuss the Negro or African colonial question. Shortly after the Fourth Congress, the ECCI made an effort to start the preparations for such a congress. In a proposition, the (unidentified) author positively argued for the arrangement of such a meeting in Moscow at which representatives from both sides of the Atlantic would be invited:

Undoubtedly delegates can be procured from the United States. There is a proletarian organization in America very sympathetic to the Comintern, which had a delegate at the IV Congress and will be represented. There are a few liberal organizations with influence among the masses that

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also may be expected to send delegates. If proper efforts are made, delegations from the West Indies, Central Africa, South Africa and in all probability North Africa maybe obtained. It is essential, however, that the greatest efforts be made to get delegates from the interior of Africa, where Imperialism feels safest.  

However, the author also pointed towards the fact that the colonial powers in Africa would do their utmost to prohibit any participation at such a gathering. Last, but not least, the biggest challenge was the lack of contact with sub-Saharan African radicals and anti-colonial organisation. In the meanwhile, the Comintern was urged to appoint a Negro Commission to coordinate and direct the work in conjunction with all the sections of the Comintern involved.

A Commission to start the preparations of a Negro World Congress was appointed by the Organisational Bureau of the Comintern in early 1923. However, apart from lengthy discussions, not much happened in Moscow and the plan of organizing the congress faded away, in part due to the opposition of some influential communists. David Ivon Jones (1883-1924), a leading South African socialist and communist and member of the ECCI, and Israel Amter (1881-1954), an American communist, were not in favour of organizing a Negro Congress. Amter argued that such a conference would be nothing else than a race conference and “the race question is not a revolutionary factor.” According to Amter, the Negro question was not a national question as was the case with the Indian or the Chinese question, and calls for race-solidarity were seen by him as being used for counter-revolutionary purposes.

Jones, who in January 1923 still supported the idea to hold a Negro Congress in Moscow, rejected the idea in his letter to the ECCI in March 1923. In his view, such a congress could be organized for radical American and Caribbean radicals, but not South Africans as there existed “[…] no highly developed intelligenzia like the American negroes, and practically no bourgeois class.” He further warned the ECCI on the race question:

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112 RGASPI 495/155/5, documents dealing with arranging a Negro World Congress in Moscow, ca 1922-1923, fol. 7 (no author, no date).
113 RGASPI 495/155/5, documents dealing with arranging a Negro World Congress in Moscow, ca 1922-1923, fol. 7 (no author, no date).
114 Minutes of the Commission appointed by the OrgBureau to organize a World Negro Congress, first document undated (probably April or May 1923), second document dated 30 May 1923, RGASPI 495/155/8, fol. 1-4. The members of the Commission were Borodin (chair), Amter, Jones, Katayama, Stewart and Levy.
116 Letter from D.I. Jones to ECCI, 8 January 1923, reproduced in Davidson et alii 2003, 118-120.
Before this lesson is properly learnt, that not the white man, but the capitalist, is the enemy of he negro, and before some measures of alliance has been achieved between the white and black on the international field, it would be a source of confusion to have a racial congress.\textsuperscript{117}

Despite the heavy backing of Sen Katayama, another influential member of the (Negro) Commission of the OrgBureau,\textsuperscript{118} the Congress was never summoned. Lovett Fort-Whiteman, who participated in the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern in 1924, tried in vain to raise the question of a World Negro Congress. The congress itself did not even nominate a special Commission to investigate the Negro Question any further, instead tactical and strategic considerations concerning the African Atlantic were discussed and outlined as part of the ‘Colonial Question’.

The Fifth Comintern Congress discussed two resolutions that were directed towards the special challenges in the African Atlantic. Whereas the first document dealt with the Negro Question in the USA,\textsuperscript{119} the second one focussed on Africa. The main emphasis of the second document, *Resolution concerning the Negro Question in the Colonies*, was on the deployment of African troops against European workers, especially during the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. The task of the European communist parties, especially those in Great Britain, France and Belgium, was to commit themselves in the demobilisation of the African colonial regiments and to disseminate communist propaganda among the African soldiers. The ultimate goal of the propaganda was the propagation of the emancipation and political self-determination of the African colonies and the establishment of independent African governments under the leadership of workers and peasants. In addition, the resolution underlined the need for the African proletariat to realize that their cause was intimately joined with the struggle of the European working class. For practical purposes, the resolution stipulated that each of the communist parties which existed in the metropolitan countries, including the USA, special commissions for the work among Negroes were to be established. Structurally and practically, these national Negro commissions were expected to closely collaborate with each other under the

\textsuperscript{117} Letter from D.I. Jones to ECCI, 23 March 1923, reproduced in Davidson et alii 2003, 120-122, quotation from p. 121.

\textsuperscript{118} Memorandum “Action for the Negro Movement Should not be Postponed” by Sen Katayama, dated 22.5.23 at Moscow, RGASPI 495/155/17, fol. 9-12.

\textsuperscript{119} Report on the American Negro Question (V. Congress; typewritten document, no date, no author), RGASPI 495/153/20, fol. 3-4.
auspices of an international organ. This (non-existing) organ was to be under direct surveillance of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI). Regarding South Africa, however, the resolution noted that the conditions in the country resembled those in the USA, and requested the ECCI to outline a special plan of action for the South African Communist Party.\(^{120}\)

Israel Amter, who participated at the Fifth Congress as a member of the American delegation, spoke at length on the Negro question and its connection to the African Atlantic. In contrast to his earlier position, Amter backed the call for an international Negro conference and stressed the central position of the African Americans in the African Atlantic.\(^{121}\) According to him, the intellectual leadership of the African race was concentrated in the USA. Therefore, apart from engaging in organizing the African American working class, the African American Communists were to be designated as the vanguard group in the African Atlantic. In his mind, one of the crucial tasks of the American Communist Party was to promote the dissemination of revolutionary American Negro organizations into Africa.\(^{122}\)

In contrast to 1922, the Comintern apparatus tried to carry out some of the 1924 visions in practice. According to Wilson, immediately following the Congress the ECCI adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of a ‘Negro Propaganda Commission’, composed of representatives of the PCF, the CPGB, the Belgian Communist Party, and the ECCI. Other branches within the Comintern-network also began their focus on Africa, most notably the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). Member organizations of the RILU were urged to aid African workers, to associate with them and assist them with literature, organizers and agitators. If possible, activities should be extended into Africa, but in view of the restrictions placed by the colonial governments on the organization of indigenous labour, the best way to mobilize the African working class was to establish trade unions among Africans living in the metropolises. However, as had happened during the earlier years, while the PCF and the RILU’s French affiliate, the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (CGTU), made an active effort in supporting and organising African

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\(^{120}\) Resolution zur Negerfrage in den Kolonien (V. Kongress: typewritten document, no date, no author), RGASPI 495/153/20, fol. 1-2.

\(^{121}\) Wilson 1974, 141.

\(^{122}\) I. Amter, Resolutionentwurf zur Negerfrage (typewritten document, no date), RGASPI 495/155/21, fol. 1-17. An English version of the document is filed in the same file, fol. 34-47, a French one in fol. 18-33.
Within the ECCI itself, a Commission was set up by the [Political] Secretariat to deal with the Negro Question, in particular the planned congress of African American workers. In early 1925, it was chaired by John Pepper. Other members were Petrov, Jackson (alias Lovett Fort-Whiteman), Hesse, Drevnitzki and Vallenius. This Commission made some far-reaching decisions at their meeting on 16 January 1925. In a detailed manner, the Commission outlined the activities and structures of a projected African American labour organization – the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) that was established in October 1925. The Congress, the Commission declared, was to be held in New York – in fact, it commenced in Chicago – and was to be organized by Comrade Jackson. Officially, the Congress should not be convened by the Communists but by active workers and members in the Negro movement. In accordance to Comintern tactics, the Communists should conduct the Congress not officially but indirectly and not in the name of the Party, they were to work as a fraction under the direction of the PolBureau (Political Bureau) of the Workers’ Party. The RILU was asked to instruct the affiliated organizations in America to adopt resolutions in sympathy with the Congress and it was proposed to bring a Negro comrade from South Africa to the Congress as a delegate. (The latter idea never materialized.) Last, but not least, the Congress should issue a manifesto to the Negroes throughout the world, summoning them to a Negro World Congress. Responsibility for the planning and organizing of the World Negro Congress was given to a Committee of Action that was to be elected by the

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123 Wilson 1974, 142-144; Sherwood 1996, 151-152.
124 The Commission was established on January 12, 1925. Minutes of Meeting of the Secretariat of the ECCI, RGASPI 495/155/29, fol. 2.
125 John Pepper was the pseudonym of Joseph Pogany, a Hungarian Communist, who came to the USA in the early 1920s as a representative of the Comintern to the American Party. During the 1920s, he was part of the top party leadership identifying himself with the Ruthenberg-Lovestone faction.
126 Probably to be identified as the Russian communist Fedor F. Raskolnikov (1892-1939) who used the alias Petrov during the 1920s when he was engaged in the Comintern-Apparatus. See further Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern, 387.
127 Person not yet identified.
128 Person not yet identified.
129 Most certainly to be identified as the Finnish communist Allan Wallenius (1890-1942). He was at this time, among others, Referent (consultant/expert) at the ECCI for matters concerning the UK and the USA.
Fort-Whiteman subsequently returned to the USA during spring 1925 and was thereafter actively engaged in the establishment of the ANLC. In Moscow, on the other hand, it seems as if the Negro Commission had become dormant after Fort-Whiteman’s departure. Activities directed towards the making of a radical African Atlantic network were for the next three years concentrated to the USA and Western Europe.

As noted above, Fort-Whiteman’s key idea was the organization of a World Negro Congress. In fact, Fort-Whiteman was quite aware of the fact that such a congress, if it was to be successful, had to integrate a Pan-African perspective:

The word “Negro” is a very indefinite term […] To come to the point: The word “Negro” has no meaning for the black man of Africa … for there are as many black races on the African continent, each on separate territory and speaking distinctly different languages as there are of white races in Europe. The designation of the proposed congress to be held at Moscow should be clear, definite and fully comprehensive. I would suggest as a designation, “International Congress of African Races”.131

Although he failed to establish the ANCL as a vanguard organization for global radical Pan-Africanism, part of his vision met some initial success. It seems as if the ANCL was able to establish contacts with Caribbean and (West) African political activists.132 In April 1926, Fort-Whiteman informed the Acting Secretary of the Krestintern133 that he had received a letter from a (unknown) worker in Lagos, Nigeria, who intended to establish a peasant organization of some kind in that part of the country. Fort-Whiteman was very exhilarated about the prospects for future political engagement in West Africa, especially in activating the peasants, and declared:

The ANLC at this time has some very broad connections, particularly in West and South Africa and we would like to work out in the Council of the Peasant’s Internationale[sic] a program of

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130 Decisions of the Negro Commission (Set up by the Secretariat), January 16, 1925, RGASPI 495/155/30, fol. 1-3. The proposals were discussed and approved by the ECCI on January 19, 1925, RGASPI 495/155/29, fol. 3.
131 Some suggestions Pertaining to the Proposed Negro World Congress to be held at Moscow by James Jackson (handwritten, no date [ca 1924]), RGASPI 495/155/25, fol. 1-4.
133 The Krestintern or Peasants’ International was a Comintern-affiliated organisation founded in 1923 to link and control peasant organisations through its headquarters in Moscow. It was dissolved in 1939.
action embracing America, West and South Africa. It would be necessary that I come to Moscow at an early date and take up this matter.\textsuperscript{134}

However, nothing further is known about this West African contact. Neither, it seems, did Fort-Whiteman go to Moscow to discuss the issue. Nevertheless, a few months later he sent a list of West African contacts and their addresses to Louis Gibarti in 1926. Gibarti, who was one of the German communist Willi Münzenberg’s aides, was the Secretary of the League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO). Münzenberg had established the LACO in 1926, officially serving as a platform for sympathetic bourgeois intellectuals and left-wing anti-colonial radicals. Behind its neutral surface the organization was one of the many Comintern front organizations, i.e., officially independent but closely monitored by Moscow. Münzenberg had propagated in 1925 for summing a world anti-colonial congress; in 1926 the LACO was given the task – with the blessing of Moscow – to organize it. In February 1927 the congress met in Brussels, and Richard B. Moore attended it as the representative of the ANCL and W.E.B. Du Bois’ NAACP. The 1927 February Congress resulted in the establishment of the League Against Imperialism, LAI;\textsuperscript{135} Moore’s active engagement resulted in him drafting the “Common Resolution on the Negro Question.”\textsuperscript{136}

Nevertheless, Moscow rather than New York or Chicago, where most of the African American radicals initially resided, or Berlin, where the headquarters of the LAI was established, was to emerge as one of the nodal points of the radical African Atlantic network. If such a network hardly existed in 1922 when Otto Huiswoud and Claude McKay made their appearance in Moscow, its first structures were set in 1925 with the arrival of the first batch of ten African American students at the KUTV or Moscow’s University of the Toilers of the East\textsuperscript{137}. Most of the students were African Americans, such as Otto Hall (enrolled as \textit{Carl Jones}\textsuperscript{138}), others originally came from the West Indies, such as the Jamaican Aubrey C. Bailey (enrolled as \textit{Jean Dessolin}),

\textsuperscript{134} Letter by James Jackson (Lovett Fort-Whiteman) to Acting General Secretary Dombal, International Farmers Council, Moscow, dated 16.4.1926, RGASPI 495/155/37, fol. 2.

\textsuperscript{135} On the link between Gibarti and Fort-whiteman, see Weiss CoWoPa 9/2007; on the LACO and LAI, see Fredrik Petersson, In Control of Solidarity? Willi Münzenberg, the Workers’ International Relief and League against Imperialism, 1921-1935, CoWoPa 12/2007.

\textsuperscript{136} Turner 2005, 146.

\textsuperscript{137} The enlistment of the African American students had been the task of Fort-Whiteman. See letter letter by Lovett Fort-Whiteman to the Director of University for Far Eastern Peoples, Moscow, dated 20.6.25, RGASPI 495/155/33, fol. 8.

\textsuperscript{138} According to Harry Haywood, his brother Otto used the pseudonym John Jones, which was translated into Russian as Ivan Ivanovitch. Haywood 1978, 167.
or West Africa, such as Holle Sella Tamba (alias *Nelson*) from Liberia and Bankole Awoonor-Renner (alias *Kweku Bankole*) from the Gold Coast. In 1926, Otto Hall’s brother Harry (alias *Harry Haywood*) was sent to Moscow, and one year later William L. Patterson (alias *William Wilson*). Despite their different original background, all of the Black students had been sent to Moscow from the USA and through the Worker’s Party or the ANLC. This was a direct outcome of the global policy of the Comintern with regards to the Negro and the colonial question: identifying the dual mission of the African American proletariat both as part of the class-struggle against capitalism of the American working class and at the same time as being designated the leadership of the oppressed Negro masses in their freedom movement in the African Atlantic.

However, while the Black students were residing in Moscow, much of the previous potentials and positive signs for the spread of a world revolution had faded away. Much to the dismay of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern leadership, the conditions of a revolution in Central Europe, especially in Germany, proved illusionary. Outside Europe, the united front policy proved fallacious. Previous allies, such as Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, turned their back on Moscow and had emerged as oppressor of the working class. The Mexican revolution, although successful, could hardly be termed as a proletarian movement. There was disappointment about the Indian bourgeoisie which turned out to be not as revolutionary as most communist had believed. Last, but not least, the promising situation for an immanent revolution in China was crushed in 1927 when Moscow’s former ally, Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang, destroyed the Chinese Communist Party. In the USA the policy of infiltration and instilling a revolutionary spirit in African American organizations such as the UNIA and the NAACP had failed. Even worse, the Workers’ Party and the ANLC had made little progress among the African American working class. Stalin, who had developed some reservations about the united front policy already in 1925, was therefore to make a sharp distinction between conciliatory and

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139 McClellan 1993, 373.
140 Haywood 1978, 148.
141 Patterson 1971, 95. According to Haywood (1978, 166-167), there were in total eight Black students in Moscow before Patterson’s arrival: he and his brother Otto, Oliver Golden, Harold Williams alias *Dessalines*, Roy Mahoney alias *Jim Farmer*, and Bankole Awoonor-Renner. However, his information is somewhat vague as he only mentioned six students by name and at least Sonya Knoll, Aubrey C. Bailey and Holle Sella Tamba were not included in his presentation.
142 On the unsuccessful approach of the Comintern towards the Chinese revolution in 1927, see Wilson 1974, 161-162.
revolutionary bourgeois liberation movement. The former were said to fear a social revolution and therefore were willing to compromise with the imperialists. The latter ones could, for the time being, still be regarded as potential target-groups for communist support, cooperation – and infiltration. However, this approach, too, was to change by 1928. The shift in the grand strategy of the Comintern was also to mark a new beginning in the approach of the Comintern towards the African Atlantic.

I.1. The Sixth Comintern Congress and the Negro Question

In Communist and Comintern studies, the year 1928 is a central landmark. The power struggle in the Soviet Union between Stalin and the ‘old guard’, especially Trotsky, Bukharin and Zinoviev, had by that time resulted in Stalin’s total victory. The effect of the power struggle was directly felt in the Comintern, resulting not only in the subsequent ‘bolshevisation’ of the Comintern apparatus but also of the various Communist parties in Europe and elsewhere. In the Comintern, the political and ideological change was directly reflected in the stipulation of a new policy, the New Line or the Class-Against-Class thesis. This policy was adopted by the Ninth ECCI Plenum in February and confirmed at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in August 1928.¹⁴³

The New Line became the doctrine for the so-called Third Period. Already in late 1927, the ECCI had initiated the ‘left turn’ by calling for ‘intensifying class struggle’, warning about ‘the treachery of social democracy’ and demanding ‘the radicalisation of the working class’.¹⁴⁴ This was as much a break with the previous attempt of rapprochement with the social democrats and left-wing bourgeoisie elements in Europe during the mid-twenties, i.e. the ‘United front’ policy, as an agenda for purges and accusations against those not in favour of Stalin and his plans. According to the proclamation of the New Line, bourgeois stabilization was to give way to a new wave of class struggle. The ‘signs of the hour’, it was believed, was the immanent radicalization of the working class and world revolution around the corner. In addition, Moscow was gripped by an “alarmist climate of thought” during 1928

¹⁴³ Kanet 1966, 82-85.
due to the cessation of diplomatic relations with Great Britain in 1927 and the believed danger of an immanent world crusade against the Soviet Union.

The main battle over future Comintern policies was fought in 1928. The final blow for the ‘old guard’ was Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin’s (1888-1938) resignation as chairman of the ECCI in 1929: Stalin had accused him and his followers of representing a Right-Wing antirevolutionary danger. The demise of Bukharin was to have grave consequences for many communist parties. Proclaiming the onset of a new revolutionary era in the world, and criticizing member organizations and castigating individual party members for insufficient radicalism, the Sixth Congress essentially lent support to Stalin’s assumption of monolithic power behind a program of rapid industrialization and forced collectivization in the Soviet Union. As the division in Moscow gave way to a monolith of power and policy, the squabbling and fractional division in the communist parties elsewhere were faced with a dilemma: either to side and subordinate oneself with the new order or to face opposition in the cold, if not expulsion from the party. This was especially the case in the German Communist Party, but also in the USA.

With regards to the commitment of the Comintern to the ‘Negro Question’ and subsequently to Africa, the factional rift within the CPUSA was crucial. The American Communist Party had been divided by quarrelling two cliques that were engaged in an open struggle for power in 1928. The erstwhile dominant faction comprised of the ‘old’ party leadership, whose central figure was Jay Lovestone (1898-1990), General Secretary of the Workers Party of the USA, member of the ECCI and a friend of Bukharin. This group was rivalled by the party minority opposition, whose leader was William Z. Foster. In the spring of 1928, Bukharin and Lovestone argued that capitalism had gained, not lost ground: thus, there were few immanent signs of a rapid revolution. Stalin disputed them and decided that revolution was at hand. Foster supported Stalin.

As Gilmore notes, the dispute in the USA (and elsewhere) about an immanent or not revolution was to have far-reaching consequences not only for future Comintern policies, but also on practical mobilization of the masses. If there were no immediate signs of a revolution, it made sense for Communists to join non-Communist organizations and unions and gradually try to change their outline from

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145 Bukharin had succeeded Zinoview as Chairman of the Comintern in 1926.
146 Gilmore 2008, p. 60.
within and to persuade other people to join the Party. However, if the economy of a country was about to collapse forthwith, the right policy of the Communists was to establish separate Communist unions and organizations as spearheads for the revolutionary forces.\textsuperscript{147}

The tense situation within the party leadership in the USA was further complicated by the racial attitude among the Party towards work among African Americans and a schism among the leading African American Communists themselves. By 1928, the ANLC was more or less split into two factions. Fort-Whiteman supported Lovestone (and vice-versa), whereas Briggs and Moore were Fosterites. The minority opposition planned a showdown with the Lovestonites at the upcoming Comintern Congress in Moscow. Lovestone originally chose Fort-Whiteman as one of the two black delegates to the congress. Foster, on the other hand, also needed African American allies to defend his case. After a protest by Moore to the ECCI, Foster supporter James W. Ford was appointed to join the US delegation. In addition, the African American students in Moscow, Harry Haywood, Otto Hall, Roy Mahoney and William L. Patterson, were to participate at the congress as well. Officially, the extended African American delegation was due to the announced intentions of the ECCI to put the Negro Question high on the agenda.\textsuperscript{148}

The Sixth World Congress of the Comintern convened in Moscow from July 17 to September 1, 1928. One of the key subjects that were discussed were the conditions for revolutionary work in the ‘semi-colonies’ and colonies, resulting in the formulation of a new strategy known as the ‘United Front from Below’. This new strategy was formulated in the ‘Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries’, better known as the Colonial Theses.\textsuperscript{149} The ultimate goal, the Theses declared, was the unconditional and complete state independence and sovereignty of all colonial peoples. However, in contrast to the previous ‘united front’ strategy of tactical support to and alliance with bourgeois nationalist-independence movements in the colonies, the new strategy heavily criticized both the Social Democrats in Europe and the national bourgeoisie in the colonies for betraying the anti-colonial struggle and of seeking a rapprochement with the imperialist powers. Instead, the Colonial Theses stressed the unity between the

\textsuperscript{147} Gilmore 2008, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{148} Gilmore 2008, 60-61.
\textsuperscript{149} The Theses were prepared almost single-handed by the Finnish Communist Otto Ville Kuusinen and were presented by him at the 46th Session of the Congress on September 1.
socialist world revolution and the labouring masses, the proletariat and the peasants, of the colonies, proclaiming a closer unity between revolutionary movements in the colonies and the Soviet Union, and underlined the need for an alliance between the Soviet Union, the Western industrial proletariat and the oppressed masses in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Consequently, the Theses called for the creation and development of communist parties as well as workers and peasants unions in the colonial areas and rejected all collaboration with nationalist movements. The performance of the communist parties in the colonial metropolises was again both criticized and highlighted: too little had been done, too many hidden racial barriers existed. Instead, the colonial work of the metropolitan parties was to be crucial: they were given the task to expand their activities into the colonies, to support the formation of colonial centres of trade union activity and to make a special effort to give a revolutionary character to the existing peasant movements.\footnote{Kanet 1966, 85-88; Wilson 1974, 166-167, 171-172.}

As during previous Comintern Congresses, the need for work in the colonies was integrally linked to Soviet national security: both the ‘Program of the Communist International’ and the ‘Theses on the Struggle against War Danger’ adopted by the Sixth Congress, underlined the crucial need to support the anticolonial struggle of the oppressed toilers in the world so that they, in case of an imperialist attack against the Soviet Union, would distract the military forces of the aggressors and lead to an overthrow of the yoke of imperialism and capitalist oppression in the colonies.\footnote{Wilson 1974, 164.}

Although some delegates, among others Bukharin himself, made references to the importance of winning the allegiance of the Black population throughout the African Atlantic, it was James W. Ford who in his speech pointed out most clearly to the Congress the absolute necessity of focussing on the agitation among African soldiers:

We must turn our faces to the colonies and prepare the colonial troops to turn their guns upon their oppressor, to fight for their liberation from imperialist exploitation and oppression. The various Parties, the French, British, American, Belgian, South African should now begin plans to turn the resentment of the Negro troops against their oppressors.\footnote{Extract of Ford’s speech at the Sixth Congress, published in the International Press Correspondence, August 31, 1928, reproduced in James S. Allen and Philip S. Foner, American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1919-1929, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1987, 186.}
In an earlier speech, Ford delivered a strong criticism of the lack of focus by, if not neglect of, the Comintern and the metropolitan Communist parties on the plight of the oppressed masses in the African Atlantic. He castigated the American Party for not carrying out the theses and directives approved by the Comintern, the effect being an extremely weak performance of the Party with regards to its work among the African American workers. Even worse, according to Ford neither the Comintern leadership nor the metropolitan parties had fully understood the global importance of activating the oppressed masses throughout the African Atlantic:

There are still millions of Negro workers in Africa--in East Africa and the Gold Coast, etc. In the West Indies and Haiti there are rumbles of revolt against British and American imperialism. In general I think it is necessary for Comrade Bukharin to stress the need for activity in these territories, and where Negro workers generally live. I think the delegates of all the Parties concerned--the British, French and American-should meet at the Congress in a special Commission for the discussion of work among the Negro workers in these colonies.153

Ford therefore argued strongly to the Congress to investigate the conditions for a truly global outreach of the Comintern as, in his mind, “(t)he next great revolutionary wave will come from the Negro workers and the exploited workers and peasants of the colonies in which Negro workers live,” and called for nomination of a special Commission to discuss the matter.154

As during the previous Congresses, special issues to be debated were first discussed in smaller groups and commissions, after which they prepared a draft version of the resolution or theses to be considered and finally adopted by the Congress. A commission or a sub-commission was usually given a certain period of time to prepare and discuss the draft version, and was usually dissolved after having finished its task. Therefore, both in 1922 and 1924 the Negro Commissions operated only for a limited period. At the Sixth Congress, a Negro Commission was also formed as part of the Colonial Commission.

The Negro Commission of the Congress had 32 delegates from 18 countries, among them the United States, South Africa, Great Britain, France, Germany, India,

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154 Extract from Ford’s speech at the Sixth Congress, published in the International Press Correspondence, August 3, 1928, reproduced in Allen and Foner 1987, 182.
and Palestine, with Otto Kuusinen as chairman. The U.S. delegation included five African Americans, namely Harry Haywood, Otto Hall, Jim Farmer (alias Roy Mahoney), James Ford, and Harold Williams. Alexander Bittelman and Jay Lovestone, each representing the opposing factions in the party, were also on the Commission. Robert Minor\textsuperscript{155}, then representing the American party in the Comintern, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, William L. Patterson and William F. Dunne\textsuperscript{156} in some occasions also participated in the meetings. Two central viewpoints were debated: should the African American population be regarded as a racial minority or as an oppressed nation? Haywood was the only American black to support the latter position. The strongest opposition came from James Ford and Otto Hall. As Haywood recalls it, Foster, Bittelman and Dunne, as well as John Pepper, supported the new position, while Lovestone remained non-committal, and Sam Darcy of the Young Communist League was the only white to oppose it.\textsuperscript{157}

Some of the delegates were also members of a similar Negro Commission that had been established at the Krestintern (Peasant International).\textsuperscript{158} Apart from Harry Haywood, Roy Mahoney (alias Farmer), William L. Patterson (alias Wilson), John W. Ford and Otto Hall (alias Jones), the Commission included Comrades Knutson, Frisar, Banderos [Banderas], Reeve, Carlton, Adams and Rue. The identity of most of the non-African Americans is not (yet) known, apart from Alfred Knutson, who was one of the leaders of the United Farmers League,\textsuperscript{159} whereas Diego Banderas was the pseudonym of the Pole Stanislaw Pestowski.\textsuperscript{160} Interestingly, at least in early August, when the Negro Commission of the Comintern met for the first time, at least the African Americans also participated in a meeting of the Negro Commission of the Krestintern.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{155} Robert Minor (1884-1952) was an influential American Communist who edited the Daily Worker during the 1920s. In 1926, he had been elected to the ECCI’s Presidium.
\textsuperscript{156} William F. Dunne (1887-1953) was an American communist. He was a member of the ECCI and the Organisational Bureau of the ECCI.
\textsuperscript{157} Allen and Foner, 123, 180. A vivid description of the heated debate both in the preparatory sub-committee and in the Negro Commission is given by Harry Haywood, who participated in all phases of the discussion. See further Haywood 1978, 227-235, 245-268.
\textsuperscript{158} Unfortunately, almost nothing is known about this Commission.
\textsuperscript{159} On Alfred Knutson (1880-?) and the US branch of the Krestintern, the United Farmers Educational League (UFEL), see Lowell K. Dyson, The Red Peasant International in America,” Journal of American History 58:4 (1972), 958-937.
\textsuperscript{160} Pestowski (1882-1937) had been a Soviet diplomatic representative in Mexico in 1923-1924; at the Sixth Congress in 1928 he was referred to as a ‘Mexican Communist’, see Manuel Caballero, Latin America and the Comintern, 1919-1943, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, 96.
The Negro Commission of the Comintern convened for three days in early August 1928 where it discussed the ‘Negro Question’ in the USA, in particular Harry Haywood’s and Nikolai Nasanov’s proposals concerning the tasks of the American Communist Party regarding work among Negroes. On the 3rd of August, Ford made a critical statement to the Commission about the lack of Negro Party members. A heated debate arose on the following day when the Commission discussed a draft version of a resolution by Haywood and Nasanov that it was to propose to the Sixth Congress. The most disputed part in the resolution was the concept of national liberation for the southern Blacks in the USA (the famous ‘Black Belt Thesis’), and Haywood was the only Afro-American delegate who supported the concept. The other African Americans, including Otto Hall, Fort-Whiteman, Ford and Patterson, either rejected it or regarded it to be pointless. Among the influential non-African American debaters, substantial criticism to the concept of a ‘separate Negro nation in the USA’ and the slogan of self-determination and complete independence of the African Americans came from Andre (Endre) Sik, a Hungarian exile teacher at the KUTV and the instructor of the African American students there. On the other hand, John Pepper, the Lovestone faction’s theoretical mentor and a participant in the Negro Commission, accepted the approach and even propagated for the establishment of a Negro Soviet Republic in the USA. The dispute was made public in a series of articles published in communist journals.

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163 Nikolai Mikhailovich Nasanov (1902-1938) had been a Soviet emissary of the Communist International Youth (KIM) to the USA in 1926-1928. After his return to the Soviet Union, he became a teacher in Marxist theory at the Lenin School. He was a member of the Negro Commission in 1928 and later Head of the Negro Bureau. He became one of the leading Soviet experts on Africa and was the first Head of the Africa Section and of the African Laboratory at KUTV. (Davidson et alii 2003, xxxii.)
164 The Tasks of the American Communist Party Regarding Negro Work (Haywood and Nassanoff, 2.8.28; copy of paper presented at the meeting of the Negro Commission), RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 57-67.
166 Resolution of Negro Commission (draft, 4.8.29), RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 94-96; for the debate, see Digest of Speeches at Negro Commission held on Aug. 4, 1928, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 85-93. The document had been prepared by a five-member committee, including Haywood, Nasanov, Ford, Patterson and Petrovsky as chairman (Solomon 1998, 77).
The initial discussions were headed by the chair of the Anglo-American Secretariat, David A. Petrovsky [i.e., Max Goldfarb (1886-1937)].\textsuperscript{169} He strongly supported the Haywood–Nasanow thesis, arguing that the ‘Negro Question’ was both a national and a racial problem. Not only that, he concluded, it was also an international or world question.\textsuperscript{170} At this stage, there were attempts by the delegates to shift the focus of the discussion. Perhaps Petrovsky’s ‘global approach’ opened the gates to broaden the perspective of ‘Negro Question’, including political agitation among African Caribbeans and Africans. On the 10\textsuperscript{th} of August, Comrade Cardenas, a Columbian Delegate in the Commission from Latin America, presented a report about the conditions of Negroes in Latin America.\textsuperscript{171}

A few days earlier, on the 7\textsuperscript{th} of August, Lovett Fort-Whiteman urged the Negro Commission to include in its agenda a discussion about how to reactivate the work among Afro-Americans and Africans. In his proposal to the Commission, he envisaged the following plan:

1. A Committee of about three should be appointed to consult WITH the rector of the University of the Eastern peoples in regard to the present welfare of the Negro students and the proposed reforms in living conditions for the institution in consideration of the new students to come in the Autumn.
2. To make up the matter of funds and provisions for more Negro students to come to Moscow.
3. Some funds from the Comintern for the Negro work in America.
4. To give vigorous urge for Negroes being drawn directly into the mechanism of the Comintern work. It is necessary that some Negro comrades get some experience in the higher spheres of activity.

\textsuperscript{169} Other aliases of Petrovsky/Goldfarb were: A. Bennet, D. Bennet, David E. Lipets, Humboldt, Sonia, Max, Maximovich, Isolda. He was a member of the Presidium of the ECCI as well as Head of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the ECCI. In 1927-1928 he was head of the Anglo-American Secretariat. (Davidson et alii 2003, xxxiv.)

\textsuperscript{170} Solomon 1998, 73-74; Berland 2000, 200.

\textsuperscript{171} To the Commission on Work Among Negroes (10.8.28, translated from Russian), report by Cardenas, Delegate of Latin America on the Negroes in Latin America, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 108fp+bp.
5. The creation of a bureau in the Comintern that would give direction to Negro work in America and Colonial work in Africa and which could be responsible for collecting material on the Negro both in the New World and Africa.

6. The carrying out of our resolution for a sub-committee of the American and British delegations to discuss the question of work in the British West Indies.  

However, for reasons not known, Fort-Whiteman’s proposition was not even discussed. One reason for the ill fate of his suggestions was that he himself had been pushed into the back in the Commission. Earlier in summer 1928, he had co-authored together with William L. Patterson and Jay Lovestone, a paper entitled “Thesis for a New Negro Policy”, in which they argued that it was counterrevolutionary to organize black southern farmers and that class solidarity among poor rural Southerners was impossible. Fort-Whiteman’s thesis, from which Patterson had distanced himself when they arrived in Moscow, was challenged by Harry Haywood’s divergent thesis, which claimed that revolution was imminent in the US South and that the Black Belt constituted a nation unto itself. In Moscow, the African American members of the Negro Commission had to decide with whom they sided in the ‘war of fractions’ that was under its way: either Lovestone and Bukharin or Foster and Stalin. Lovett Fort-Whiteman trusted Bukharin; Stalin supported Haywood’s thesis. In the Negro Commission, Haywood was backed by Sen Katayama and Nikolai Nasanov: Fort-Whiteman’s thesis never had a chance and was quickly rejected.

Two days later, on the 9th of August, another topic was brought forward for consideration to the Negro Commission, namely S.P. Bunting’s report on South Africa. Compared to the two earlier reports, the South African question and the situation in the South African Communist Party were discussed at length during the following weeks. With regards to the race contra class question, Bunting declared that the Africans in South Africa did not want a separate state, but rather full citizenship rights. As to be expected, this proposition led to a fierce debate. Petrovsky

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172 Proposition by L. Fort-Whiteman (no date, handwritten add: 1928), RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 97. The proposition is attached to the Minutes of Meeting, 7.8.1928, which could indicate that it was presented to the Commission during the meeting.


criticized the South African party for misunderstanding the peculiar conditions of the African population in the country and underlined the need for an agrarian programme and the slogan for an independent native South African Republic. A sub-commission including Comrades Haywood, Bittelman, Williams\textsuperscript{177}, Bunting\textsuperscript{178} and Roux\textsuperscript{179} was appointed and was given the task to draft a resolution.\textsuperscript{180} Not surprisingly, the sub-commission’s draft resolution strongly supported the vision of ‘Native Republics’ in South Africa, a concept that was highly criticized by the South African delegation.\textsuperscript{181} The dispute was eventually solved by a dictate of the ECCI in October 1928 in favour of the resolution, underlining the need to establish an independent Native South African Republic as a stage towards a Workers’ and peasants’ Republic with full rights for all races Black, Coloured and White.\textsuperscript{182}

The Negro Commission finally discussed and approved a draft version of a resolution on the Negro Question on August 30, 1928.\textsuperscript{183} The document mainly followed the outlines of Haywood’s and Nasanov’s earlier outline of the Black Belt Thesis. After further revisions, the Resolution was presented and adopted by the Political Secretariat of the ECCI on October 26, 1928, almost two months after the end of the Congress.\textsuperscript{184} The Colonial Theses, which had been adopted by the Congress, also contained a separate section dealing with ‘The Negro Question’. In this way, the Negro Question was, on the one hand, intimately linked with the Colonial Question (and not dealt with separately as during previous Congresses) but, on the other hand, the analysis of the conditions and strategic discussions about...
policies in the USA and in South Africa were to become separated from those in the other parts of the African Atlantic. If anything, the solutions to the Negro Question put forward in the Colonial Theses did not echo radical Pan-Africanist positions, on the contrary, what mattered was class, not race.

In theory, the Resolution was to become the guidelines of the CPUSA. In praxis, however, there was much confusion in the USA of which policy to adapt for the next years. John Pepper was first on the scene by republishing his article on the ‘American Negro Problem’ and his radical call for an independent southern Negro republic as a pamphlet in late 1928. Only in February 1929, the Resolution itself was published, but not in any prestigious theoretical party organs but in the Daily Worker. It finally appeared in The Communist in January 1930, giving it full status as an official statement of policy. By that time the intra-party struggles between the Lovestone and Foster faction had ended in the former’s defeat, at the American Party’s Sixth Convention in March 1929, and the subsequent dismissal of Lovestone and his backers from the party.

However, the Black Belt Thesis had never much support even among the African American communists. Neither Cyril Briggs nor any other leading comrade wholeheartedly supported the call for self-determination, and Otto Huiswoud openly attacked the policy in an article in The Communist, the leading theoretical journal of the CPUSA, in February 1930. Huiswoud argued in favour of separating the class-against-class aspect of the Colonial Question with that of a race-against-race interpretation of the Negro Question, although he opposed to the idea of self-determination of the Black Belt in the USA. According to him, the Negro Question in Africa and in the Caribbean was of a “national-colonial character”, in contrast to the situation in the USA where it was of a “racial character” although the African American population, in his mind, had no distinct language and culture from the dominant racial group. As a consequence, Huiswoud rejected the validity of national self-determination of the US Black Belt. Huiswoud’s article prompted a fierce and critical reply by Haywood.

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186 Berland 2000, 204-205.
187 Klehr and Tompkin 1989, 357.
189 Haywood 1978, 322-323.
The African American comrades in Moscow were furious about the lax attitude among the party leadership towards implementing the Resolution, and a lot of ink was spilled in 1929 and 1930 as Harold Williams and Harry Haywood sent letter after letter reminding the comrades about their obligations. Some of the disputes were also fought in public, such as Haywood’s lengthy critique of Huiswoud’s position or when he and Nasanov criticized Endre Sik’s argument that the slogan of self-determination was inappropriate. The debate was eventually brought forward to the Comintern’s Political Secretariat in March 1930 where it was decided to eliminate the phrase “to the point of separation” from the Resolution text; hence, the Communists would “openly and unreservedly fight for the right of Negroes for national self-determination in the South.” However, the final chapter was opened in late August 1930 when the Negro Commission met anew under the chairmanship of Kuusinen. At its meeting, Pepper’s initial call for a Negro Soviet Republic was rejected and a new version of the Resolution was discussed and approved.

The second ‘Resolution on the Negro Question in the USA’ was in the end a compromise between Soviet vision and African American concern, as Berland has underlined. Instead of a radical version of the Black Belt Thesis, the resolution supported the rights of African Americans to self-determination in the southern US states, but did not explicitly call for a Negro Soviet Republic. However, as van Enckevort already has underlined, there was a dramatic shift in the second version of the Resolution with regards to the role of the African American as the avant garde of a Black revolutionary movement worldwide. In the first version of the Resolution, great emphasis was laid on the double historical mission of the African American working class: in the USA, they were regarded as the potential allies of the revolutionary proletariat, in the African Atlantic, they were to assume the hegemony of all Negro liberation movements. In the 1930 version of the text, this call had been left out completely! Instead, the leading role in the radicalization of the African Atlantic working class was to be assumed by the ITUCNW, indicating that the Negro Question in the USA was to be differentiated from the Colonial Question.

190 Several of the letters are filed in RGASPI 495/155/80.
If the main emphasis of the Resolution was directed towards the situation in the USA, only one paragraph clearly stressed the link between the conditions in the USA and the oppression of the Black race throughout the African Atlantic. However, to understand the emergence of an active engagement in the African Atlantic, Paragraph Seven of the resolution is a key ideological text as it both re-enacted the more or less forgotten statements on this issue of the Fifth Congress as well as gave an impetus for forming a global African Atlantic network. Paragraph Seven declared that

… (t)he Negro race everywhere is an oppressed race. Whether it is a minority (USA, etc.), majority (South Africa) or inhabits a so-called independent state (Liberia, etc.), the Negroes are oppressed by foreign or native imperialism. Thus, a common tie of interest is established for the revolutionary struggle of race and national liberation of the Negroes in various parts of the world from imperialist domination. The aim and purpose of the work among the Negroes should be to organise the Negro workers of the USA as the vanguard of the Negro struggle all over the world against imperialist oppression. A strong Negro revolutionary movement in the USA will be able to influence and direct the revolutionary movement in all those parts of the world where the Negroes are oppressed by Imperialism.\(^\text{194}\)

The task of building the network was not anymore that of the metropolitan parties but of the radical African American intelligentsia. The question was who would take responsibility? Was it to be the duty of the African American leadership in the USA or those comrades who were resident in Moscow at the end of the Sixth Congress? It seems as if the decision was made in favour of Moscow, although so far no documentary evidence has been found in the archives in Moscow. Perhaps the decision of the CPUSA to create a Negro Department in October 1928, headed by Otto Huiswoud, and the nomination of five African Americans – Cyril Briggs, Otto Huiswoud, Otto Hall, John Henry and Ed Welsh – into its Central Committee in March 1929, signalled an increase in the attention of the Party of ‘Negro work’. In praxis, their main challenge was to get a footing in the US South in accordance with ‘United Front from Below’ tactics, a task that demanded time and energy of the African American leadership in the USA.

1.2. The Establishment of the Negro Bureau

\(^\text{194}\) ECCI: Resolution of the Negro Sub-commission of the Negro Question in the United States (30.8.28), RGASPI 495/154/51, fol. 7.
The Negro Commission was dissolved after the closure of the Sixth Congress. Some of the African American students, such as Otto Hall, returned to the USA, others, such as Harry Haywood and William L. Patterson remained in Moscow. In addition, there was James W. Ford, not a student but a US representative at the RILU. No Africans were anymore around – Bankole Awoonor-Renner had already left Russia in early 1928 and returned to West Africa. Holle Sembe Tamba’s whereabouts during this period are not known. Neither Patterson nor Haywood refers to him in their autobiographies which indicate that Tamba either had left the country or was not anymore enrolled as a student at the KUTV. Whatever the case, Tamba had not been engaged in the Sixth Congress nor in the Negro Commission and neither are there any traces of him in the Comintern-files until the early 1930s.

The existence of the three African American comrades in Moscow was to mark the beginning of a new era in the Comintern’s approach to the African Atlantic. Whether or not it was due to their direct influence on the decision makers in the Comintern apparatus is unclear as none of them at that time – officially – had an influential position in the organization. On the other hand, both Haywood and Ford had been actively engaged in the Sixth Congress, and Haywood continued to closely cooperate with Nasanov. The two latter ones had been the mater-minds of the newly adopted Resolution on the Negro Question, and now it was up to both the American Party as well as the Comintern to materialize its goals, namely to put the African Atlantic on the agenda of the Comintern. The question was only: how? Earlier Theses on the Negro Question had been mere dead letters, and despite the hopes of the establishment of a standing Commission in charge of coordinating the work among African population in all parts of the Atlantic, not much had been achieved. This time, however, the African American delegates decided to push for a change in tactics.

A change occurred in Moscow when the Political Secretariat of the ECCI decided to organize a Negro Bureau on November 22, 1928. According to the minutes, the call to establish such an institution was made by the ‘Negro comrades’. The Eastern Secretariat considered twice their initiative, which indicates that the original proposition was probably delivered to the Eastern Secretariat after the confirmation of the Colonial Theses in late October 1928. The Political Secretariat

195 The formal decision of the formation of the Negro Bureau was made on December 10, 1928 (Memorandum VL/5, dated 15.3.1929, no author, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 10).
considered the idea of the establishment of a special Negro Bureau to be a wise move, especially as it was noted that there was a need to broaden the ‘revolutionary activities’ in not only in America but also in Africa. In its declaration, the Political Secretariat repeated the critique against the metropolitan parties for their inability to focus on the colonial question, stating that “the French, British, Belgian and other parties have hitherto found it impossible to engage in work in Africa to the extent needed and desired by the CI, and from scope of their “home” activities must be unable for some time to do so.” As a consequence, therefore, the Political Secretariat resolved:

1. To set up under the Eastern Secretariat a Negro Bureau, composed of 5 comrades whose number shall in the future be augmented by representatives directly from the territories concerned.
2. Of this bureau part shall function as a Negro Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat between whom and the Eastern Secretariat there shall be a liaison.
3. The functions of this Bureau shall be to conduct research, propaganda, and agitation, as well as the building of connection with the Negroes.196

The decision of the Political Secretariat envisaged a new era in the Comintern’s commitment towards the African Atlantic. According to the proposed setup, two separate units were to be established: one as part of the Anglo-American Secretariat and one under the Eastern Secretariat. The Negro Commission of the Anglo-American secretariat was mainly to focus on the Negro Question, i.e., to concentrate on ‘Negro work’ in the USA (and South Africa). The Negro Bureau, on the other hand, was to focus on the Colonial Question, i.e., the African colonies.

In addition to the two special units of the Comintern, Negro Departments had been established both at the Krestintern and the Profintern by 1928. While the Negro unit of the Profintern, the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), was to emerge as the key instrument in the establishment of a global radical African Atlantic network, the Negro Commission of the Krestintern seems soon to have fallen into oblivion both in Moscow and among later researchers. Virtually nothing is known of the activities Negro Commission of the Krestintern and

196 ECCI/Material re Negro question, RGASPI 495/20/425, fol. 46-47. An identical copy of this document is located in RGASPI 495/154/54, fol. 6-7. This copy, too, is dated 22.XI.28 but stamped [Material für Sekretariat].
its engagement in the Negro – or even Colonial – Question. Previous research has not touched upon this question at all; in fact, hitherto the activities of the Krestintern have only been superficially established, mainly focusing on its failed activities in Eastern and Central Europe and those among farm labourers in the USA.\(^{197}\) At the time of the Sixth Congress, however, the Krestintern, too, had come to realize the importance to engage with Black peasants and farm labourers in both the USA and in South Africa. This is evident from the entries in the Krestintern-files covering the years 1927 to 1931. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, on the other hand, were more or less white spots on the global map of the Krestintern.\(^{198}\)

In principle, the activities of the Negro Bureau/Eastern Secretariat and Negro Commission/Anglo-American Secretariat were supposed to be integrated and to stimulate their activities. However, it was soon realized that neither of the two were working very effectively. In an undated memo by an unidentified author, criticism against the lack of focus and shortcomings of the two units was brought forward. The author, who had been appointed – most probably by the Political Secretariat\(^{199}\) – to investigate the issue, declared that the Negro Bureau (the author referred to it as the Eastern Department Negro Commission in his memorandum) had spent too much of its time on America, neglecting its mission in Africa and Latin America. Consequently, the Negro Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat (“our Anglo American subcommission”) had nothing to do and was hardly functioning at all. As a remedy, the author proposed a clear-cut division of work of the two Commissions: the Anglo-American Negro Commission was to concentrate on America, the Negro Bureau of the Eastern Secretariat on Latin America and Africa. Further, the Anglo-American Negro Commission was to be strengthened by additional members, such as Robin Page Arnot\(^{200}\) as well as Comrades Wolfe\(^{201}\), Phillips\(^{202}\) and Elsa Bloch\(^{203}\). The

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\(^{198}\) The Krestintern was dissolved in 1933 after a ‘fairly unsuccessful’ life (Rees and Thorpe, Introduction, *International Communism and the Communist International 1919-1943*, 2. The files of the Krestintern have not yet been disseminated by my research group. However, information provided from the Comintern Online Catalogue, indicates the existence of material related to both the Negro and the Colonial Question, in addition to correspondence, in several units of the Krestintern (fond 535, opis 1 and opis 2).

\(^{199}\) A careful reading of the document reveals that the author was a member of the Anglo-American Secretariat, perhaps even of its Negro Commission (“our Anglo American subcommission”) as he – most likely it was a male person as there no female members in the Secretariat or the Commission – subsequently referred to “us” when discussing the duties of this particular Commission.

\(^{200}\) Robin Page Arnot (1890-1986) was assistant director of the Eastern Secretariat of the ECCI in 1929, and he represented the British party at the ECCI in 1928–1929.
Negro Bureau of the Eastern Secretariat, too, was to be expanded by bringing in representatives of the French and Belgian Party as well as from Latin America. Finally, the author suggested that the two commissions should join together and be regarded as one big commission for final action on “all American question [sic].”

Whether or not these proposals were approved and carried out is not known. It seems, however, that they did not bring any solution to the overlapping activities of the two units. Therefore, a new plan was drafted in March 1929, proposing a clear-cut division of focus in the work in the African Atlantic. According to the memorandum, the Negro Commission (termed ‘Negro Sub-Commission’ in the memo) of the Anglo-American Secretariat was to make preliminary studies and to prepare questions concerning work among the Negroes of the United States and South Africa. For similar studies and the preparation of questions concerning work in the French and Belgian colonies of Africa, it was suggested that a Negro Sub-Commission under the Roman Secretariat was to be formed. Although not directly stated in the memo, work in the British African colonies as well as in the British Caribbean was to remain under the Negro Bureau of the Eastern Secretariat. In addition, the two Negro Sub-Commissions were also to constitute sub-commissions of the Negro Bureau and the members of these two sub-commissions were to be members of the Negro Bureau with full rights. Whereas the preliminary elaboration and preparation of materials in connection with concrete questions was to be the main task of the various sub-commissions, coordination and surveillance was to be restricted to the Negro Bureau. However, the memorandum did recognize that the final consideration of any question

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201 Probably Bertram D. Wolfe (1896-1977). He was a German-descent American communist. In 1924, he represented the Mexican Communist Party at the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern. In 1925, he became educational director of the Workers (Communist) Party and was a delegate to the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928 and was its representative on the ECCI in 1929. However, he opposed Stalin on American affairs and returned in June 1929 to the USA, where he, together with Jay Lovestone and others, formed a dissident Communist Party. (Lazitch and Drachkovitch 1986, 514.)

202 Unknown, referred to as a member of “Youth”, i.e., the Communist Youth Movement (KIM).

203 Elsa Bloch (1904-?) had become a communist while studying at the New York University Graduate School. She was living in Berlin and in Moscow during the 1920s. On her return to the USA in the early 1930s, she used the pseudonym Lydia Stahl. See Scope of Soviet activity in the United States. Hearing before the Subcommittee to Investigate the administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-Fourth Congress, second session,” checked at http://www.archive.org/stream/scopeofsovietact2123unit/scopeofsovietact2123unit_djvu.txt (31.3.2009).

204 Proposals on Relations and Work of the Two Negro Commissions (no date, no author), RGASPI 495/155/62, fol. 5. An identical copy is located in RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 101. As Wolfe had returned to the USA in June 1929, the document had to be written sometimes during the early months of 1929 while he still was in Moscow.
from the point of view of its adaptability to the general political line of the given party and its general practicability was to be referred to the Anglo-American or Roman Secretariat, which was either take the final decision on the matter or to refer it to the Political Secretariat for confirmation. Finally, the memorandum underlined that the Negro Bureau was not connected to any Party, except through the corresponding ‘Länder-Sekretariat’, and suggested that letters of instruction concerning work among Negroes should be despatched to the given party through the corresponding Secretariat, over the joint signatures of the Secretariat and the Negro Bureau.205

Whether or not the March 1929 memorandum was approved by the ECCI is not known. Nevertheless, a kind of division of labour was achieved during the early months of 1929. As had been proposed in the two initiatives, the USA and South Africa were to remain under the Anglo-American Secretariat. However, the proposition to establish a new Negro Sub-Commission under the Roman Secretariat could not be realized. The plan was to detach French-speaking members, including suitable ‘Negro comrades’, to this unit, but no such persons were available in Moscow at that time. In principle, the Negro Bureau was projected as the central coordinating unit focussing on work in Africa and the Caribbean.

However, for reasons not known, the Negro Bureau was reorganized during late summer 1929. The only document about the reorganization in the 495/155-files is a letter sent by Harry Haywood to the CPUSA, where he informed the party about the change. The discussions and propositions behind this decision are not filed among the papers of the Negro Bureau, indicating that it had been planned by higher instances of the Comintern-Apparatus. Van Enckevort assumes that the meagre output of the Bureau and its incapability of engaging the metropolitan parties in colonial and Negro work lay behind the reorganization206. Be as it may, the result was that the Bureau was ‘downgraded’ and changed into a section under the Eastern Secretariat. Hereafter,

205 Copy of a memorandum without name or author, addressed as VL/5 dated 15.3.29, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 10. Additional marking: Copy to Woolf, Bell, Wagner, Barbe. Another (identical) copy of the memorandum is filed in RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 6. Woolf is probably a misspelling of (Bertram D.) Wolfe. Thomas Bell (1882-1940) was a Scottish communist who represented the CPGB in the Comintern during the 1920s. Henri Barbé (1902-1966) was a French communist and, as Bell, was a member of the ECCI, its Presidium and its Political Secretariat. The identity of Wagner is not certain and could be a pseudonym or alias – the German communist Otto Braun (1900-1974) is known to have used it during the 1920s.
206 Van Enckevort 2000, 86.
the Negro Section was to be responsible to the Eastern Secretariat and the ECCI for work among Negroes in all parts of the world.207

A further reorganization was initiated in November 1929 when Harold Williams proposed the merger of the Negro Sub-Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat with the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat. Criticizing the overlapping of the two units, Williams suggested that all members of the Negro Sub-Commission were to be members of the Negro Section. However, for the purpose of distributing the work, a special commission for work among African Americans and in South Africa was to be established and was to be at the same time a Sub-Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat.208 As a consequence, the division of labour was made effective by this reorganization: the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat was to focus on Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) and the Caribbean, the Negro Sub-Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat on the USA and South Africa. Put in other words: the separation of the two units underlined the geographical division of the focus of the Negro and the colonial question.

After its final reorganization, the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat consisted of members from the Comintern, the RILU and the Krestintern as is revealed from a list of persons to be invited to its meetings. Although undated, an internal analysis of the document reveals that it must have been prepared after the final separation of the work of the two Negro Commissions, as no member from the Anglo-American Secretariat was to be invited. Consequently, Harry Haywood’s name was missing from the list as he was a member of the Negro Sub-Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat. On the other hand, Haywood’s close friend and collaborator on the Black Belt thesis Nikolai Nasanov was a member of the Negro Section, but he was not listed as a member of the Negro Commission but the Communist Youth Movement (KIM). Other Comintern representatives were Georgi Safarov,209 who was a member of the Eastern Secretariat, and one Comrade Smith210

207 Letter from Harry Haywood to the CP of the USA, dated 30.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 78.
208 Williams, Memorandum, dated 5.11.2929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 107. Curiously, Williams used the term ‘Negro Bureau’ in his memo although the Bureau at this time already had been renamed into the Negro Section.
209 Georgi Safarov (1891-1942), a Russian Bolshevik who was engaged in organizing the Far Eastern Section of the Comintern during the 1920s. He belonged to the Zinoviev opposition in 1925 and was expelled from the RCP(B) in 1927. After representing a self-criticism, he was re-admitted to the party in 1928. In 1929-1930 he again worked in the Far Eastern section.
210 The person’s identity is not known.
of the ECCI. Comrade Rubenstein and Ballam\textsuperscript{211} represented the RILU, James Ford and Comrade Slavin its Negro Section (see below), whereas Alex Noral was the representative of the Krestintern\textsuperscript{212} and Comrade Sheik that of the Agrarian Institute. Several members were listed as delegates either from the KUTV, such as Comrade Vaughan Vice, or from the Lenin School, namely Comrades Jones, Brown and Phillips. Further, there was Comrade Idelson, who lived in Room 229 at Hotel Lux. Last, but not least, there was Comrade Wilson, i.e., William L. Patterson, although not listed as a representative (or student) of the KUTV but – seemingly – as ‘independent’ African American member of the Bureau. (He is referred to in the list as living at Coyusnaia, 4.)\textsuperscript{213}

As noted above, one of the main tasks of the Negro Bureau was to investigate the potentials for the radicalization of the masses in the African Atlantic. However, at the time when the Negro Bureau was established in late 1928, there was an apparent deficit in knowledge and first hand information about the political, economic and social conditions in the region. Although the African American members were able to provide valuable insights in the plight of the oppressed African American working class, much less, if anything, was known about the situation in the Caribbean or in Africa. Therefore, one of the first decisions in January 1929 was to order an impressive amount of newspapers, magazines and journals. The list included US American,\textsuperscript{214} African and European periodicals, among others the \textit{African World}, \textit{West Africa}, \textit{L’Afrique Française}, \textit{The South African Worker}, \textit{The Workers’ Herald} (SA), \textit{Uganda News}, \textit{Gold Coast Nation}, \textit{Lagos Records}, \textit{A.P.O.} (Official Organ of African People’s Organisation, SA).\textsuperscript{215} In addition, the Bureau ordered an impressive amount of African American journals, including the \textit{Negro Champion}, \textit{Opportunity C.}, \textit{Journal of Negro Life}, \textit{Journal of Negro History}, \textit{Crisis}, \textit{Chicago Defender}, \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, \textit{Afro-American}, \textit{Associated Negro Press Agency}, and the \textit{Negro

\textsuperscript{211} Listed as ‘American representative’.

\textsuperscript{212} Noral, who was a farmer from the US West Coast, worked in the Krestintern in 1928, representing American farmers (Haywood 1978, 292).

\textsuperscript{213} ‘List of comrades invited to meetings of NEGRO SECTION’, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 81-84.


\textsuperscript{215} Other European periodicals listed to be ordered were: \textit{The Labour Monthly}, \textit{Worker’s Life}, \textit{The Communist}, \textit{The London Times}, \textit{The Nation}, \textit{L’Humanite}, \textit{The Anti-Imperialist}.
One month later, Harry Haywood sent a letter to Cyril Briggs in New York, asking him to supply the Negro Bureau with news clippings from *The New York Times*, *The New York World* and *The New York American* appertaining to the Negro Question in the USA. The clippings were to be sent regularly to Moscow; his expenses were to be paid by the Negro Bureau, Haywood promised Briggs.\footnote{Letter from Harry Haywood to 'Comrade Cyril Briggs', dated Moscow, February 19, 2009, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 4.}

The unclear focus of the various Negro Commissions in 1929 is also reflected in Harry Haywood’s autobiography. According to his recollections, he served as the Vice-Chairman of the Negro Sub-Commission of the Eastern Secretariat, and Nasanov as its Chairman. In his mind, this particular Sub-Commission had been established as a ‘watch-dog’ committee to check on the application of the Sixth Congress decisions with reference to the Negro Question in the USA and South Africa.\footnote{Haywood 1978, 281.} However, as has been noted above, after the proposal of a demarcation of spheres of duty in March 1929, the Eastern Secretariat was to have nothing to do with either the USA or South Africa. On the other hand, it seems as if the Negro Bureau (after August/September, the Negro Section) of the Eastern Secretariat emerged as the coordinating unit for work in the African Atlantic in Moscow during 1929. There was even a proposal sent to Kuusinen asking him to put to the Small Commission a consideration to appoint Haywood as practicant in the Negro Bureau. His projected task was to study African national and agrarian problems; the idea was to prepare a draft for a programme for the ‘equatorial colonies’, i.e., the Belgian, British and French colonies in Central Africa\footnote{Letter to Kuusinen, dated 18.5.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 27. It seems that the proposal was never realized. Haywood did not refer to the plan in his autobiography.}. It is therefore possible that the early overlapping in the work of the different Negro sub-committees resulted in the concentration of Negro work into the Negro Bureau/Section, which was headed by Nasanov and Haywood. On the other hand, parallel to the Negro Bureau/Section was the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers that had been established by the RILU in mid-1928.

I.3. The Establishment of the ITUCNW

\footnote{List of Periodicals required by Negro Bureau 24.1.1929 (copy taken to Abramov by Williams, 25.1.29), RGASPI 495/155/74, fol. 1-3.}
The Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) was one of the Comintern’s most important front organizations, existing between 1921 and 1937. The foundation of the RILU was, in essence, a Soviet reaction to the re-foundation of the ‘reformist’ or Social Democratic International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), which had its headquarters in Amsterdam. Whereas syndicalism had a major influence in the RILU during the early years, the movement became a firmly communist one after 1923-24 when syndicalism had either abandoned or joined the party. After 1924 the RILU became merely the trade union-arm of the Comintern. From the mid-1920s, the RILU looked upon the colonial and ‘semi-colonial’ world as a new forum for world revolution, thereby extending its activities outside the European and North American context. In 1927, a ‘Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat’ was set up to co-ordinate policy. Attempts were also made to set up ‘red trade unions’ at the national level and specialists ‘sub-internationals’ for stevedores (the International of Sea and Harbour Workers, 1930) and Latin America (the Latin American Federation, 1929).  

Similar to the Comintern, the engagement of the RILU with the African Atlantic was during much of the 1920s oscillated between non-existence (Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean) and, at most, a lukewarm attitude (USA and South Africa). For the RILU, too, the year of 1928 was to mark the beginning of a new era in the approach towards the African Atlantic. Already the Fourth Congress of the RILU in March 1928 highlighted the need for revolutionary work in Africa and a decision was made that a subsequent meeting was to be held to decide upon strengthening the work of the RILU in the African Atlantic. Present at the Congress was James W. Ford, representing the American trade unions. 

A few months later, a totally new situation had emerged. Concurrent with the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, the Executive Committee of the RILU held a separate meeting in July 1928. All African Americans who attended the Congress as well as delegates from ‘imperialist countries with colonies having a Negro population’ were invited as external participants at the meeting of the RILU. Thus, not only did James W. Ford, who himself was an African American representative at the RILU at that time, but also William L. Patterson, Otto Hall and Harry Haywood participated at the sessions. The outcome of the discussions at the session was a draft

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221 Wilson 1974, 176.  
222 Wilson 1974, 176
resolution on the establishment of a trade union office at the RILU. On July 31, 1928, the Executive Bureau of the RILU acknowledged to the idea and issued a Resolution on the organization of an 'International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers' 223.

According to the Resolution, the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) was to be composed of two representatives from the African American workers of the USA, and one representative each from South Africa, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Cuba. Representatives from Haiti, East Africa, Portuguese Africa, the Belgian Congo, Liberia, French Equatorial Africa, and those countries of Latin America where there are considerable numbers of Black workers were to be included in the future. 224 At this point, however, the composition of the ITUCNW was still open, in another document dealing with the setup of the committee, reference is only made to Comrades Ford (USA), Lagum (i.e., La Guma[?], South Africa), and Ducados (Guadeloupe). 225

The main duty of the ITUCNW was to engage the Black population throughout the African Atlantic in the labour and trade unions. New joint unions of White and Black workers were to be created, or, if this was not possible due to racial discrimination in the unions, independent Black (Negro) unions were to be established. Much emphasis was laid on the establishment of a global network, i.e., “the work of setting up connections with the Negro workers of the whole world and the unification of the wide masses of Negro workers on the basis of class struggle.” The first task of the committee was to publish a bulletin and to prepare and convene an International Conference of Negro Workers at the end of 1929. 226

Although the ITUCNW was the brain child of the RILU, its formation had to be confirmed by the ECCI. Early in August 1928, Ford sent a memorandum on the establishment of the ITUCNW to the Negro Commission, 227 and the ECCI

227 Resolution on trade union work among Negroes for the Negro Commission of the 6th Congress of the CI (signed: Ford, 1928), RGASPI 495/155/53, fol. 2.

subsequently approved the establishment of the ITUCNW.228 Whereas the publication of a bulletin seemingly did not require any further instructions, the ECCI issued a detailed resolution concerning the arrangements of an International Congress of Negro Workers.229 The dating of this resolution is somewhat problematic. According to the Resolution text, the conference was to convene in Berlin, or somewhere else in Germany if arrangements in Berlin turned out to be impossible, "not later than October 1929." As the practical organization of such a conference would at least take about one year, it is much likely that the Resolution was issued sometimes during late 1928, perhaps even before the first meeting of the ITUCNW on December 1, 1928, which had on its agenda the organization of an international conference.

The composition, agenda and duties of the ITUCNW were discussed at the first meeting of the unit in December 1, 1928. At this point, the ITUCNW comprised of Comrades Diament, Ford, Haywood, Heller, Rubinstein, Slavin and Wilson (Patterson). The group elected Ford as Chairman and Slavin as Secretary. A detailed program of the ITUCNW was to be prepared by Ford, while Slavin was to make special investigations and to report on work in reference to Negro workers on the international scale, such as the League of Nations, the ILO and on forced labour. In addition, Slavin was given the task to read German and French press and report on questions of Negro workers. A bulletin, called 'The Negro Worker', was to be edited and published by Ford, Wilson and Slavin. Slavin’s role was to give ‘technical assistance’ to the two others and to maintain contact with the different departments of the RILU in connection with the publication of the bulletin. Other practical issues discussed included the duties of the members of the Committee, the organization of Negro seamen and the regulations of the meetings of the ITUCNW.230

The various members of the ITUCNW were given immediate special duties, especially the writing of pamphlets. Ford was to be responsible for arranging all meetings of the Committee, to report on the situation in the USA, to be in contact with the Comintern and Krestintern on Negro questions and to prepare a pamphlet concerning 'Negro Trade Unions'. Slavin, in addition to his above mentioned duties, was to prepare a pamphlet on 'Reformists and the Negro Worker'. Comrade Diament

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229 On the Convening of the First International Conference of Negro Workers (no date, written probably in 1928), RGASPI 495/155/53, fol. 3. It is likely that a draft version of the Resolution had been prepared by the RILU, perhaps even by some members of the ITUCNW.
was put in charge of drafting a model program for the organization of short courses for trade union organizers among Negro workers, whereas Comrade Rubinstein was to investigate the issue of industrialization in Africa. Haywood and Wilson (Patterson) were asked to write pamphlets, the former one on ‘Wages of Negro Workers in USA’, the latter one on ‘Wages and Working Conditions of Negroes in Equatorial Africa’. While Haywood’s assignment was much in line with his previous obligations, it was not for William Patterson. For him, the exercise with Equatorial Africa was to broaden his previous engagement that so far had been restricted to North America.231

Apart from the members of the committee, it was decided to commission a series of special pamphlets from students from the KUTV and the Lenin School. Comrade Vough (Vaughan) was to be asked to write a pamphlet on ‘Condition of Negro Women in Industry of USA’, a similar one on the ‘Conditions of Native Women in South Africa’ was to be requested from Comrade River. Another – unnamed – South African comrades were to be invited to write about ‘Wages of Natives in South Africa’ and ‘Wages of Europeans in South Africa’. Other special pamphlets to be issued were on the ‘Negro Agricultural Workers in USA’ by Comrade Farmer, the ‘Rationalisation and Negro Workers USA’ by Comrade Brady, the ‘Conditions of Young Negro Workers USA’ by Comrade Bennet, and the ‘AF of L and Negro Workers’ by Comrade Vessey.232

I.4. In Conclusion: Outlining a Radical African Atlantic

The decisions made in Moscow in during the latter half of 1928, including the Resolution on the Negro Question and the Theses on the Colonial Question as well as the formation of the Negro Bureau and the ITUCNW, marked the beginning of a new era in the commitment of the Comintern in ‘Negro work’. Although there had been a previous commitment of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern to address the special conditions of the Black population throughout the Atlantic basin, not much had been previously achieved. One of the main drawbacks of the previous approaches had been the inability of both the Comintern and the metropolitan Communist Parties to overcome their Eurocentric biases, including the assumption that world revolution

was to start in Europe. Although not in theory, both the Colonial as the Negro Questions were in praxis subordinated to the class struggle among the (white) proletariat in Europe and North America. Support to anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic movements posed a challenge to the Comintern, but as long as the ‘United Front’ policy was officially adapted, tactical alliances with bourgeois and radical nationalistic movements and intellectuals both in the colonial capitals and in the colonies could be formed. However, the ‘Class against Class’ and ‘United Front from Below’ policies that were outlined at the Sixth Comintern Congress meant an end to such an approach. Instead, the Comintern was in need to build up a totally new network of colonial activists and organizations. This time, the approach was to include activists from various parts of the African Atlantic.

The conditions for the establishment of a global network that was to integrate radicals all over the African Atlantic were relatively good in 1928. Compared to 1922 or 1924, when only one or two African Americans participated at the World Congresses of the Comintern, in 1928 there were at least six African Americans engaged in the Negro Commission. Whereas three of them, Otto Hall, Harold Williams and Farmer, were to return to the USA after the Congress, three of the remaining African Americans, namely Harry Haywood, William L. Patterson and James W. Ford, were to become heavily engaged in the projection of future work in the African Atlantic. If the Negro Bureau of the Eastern Secretariat was to emerge in 1929 as the top relay station and decision-making unit, the ITUCNW was to emanate as the practical organizer of and key actor in a global network.